THE THRESHOLD

Rev. HENRY HOWARD

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Studies in the First Psalm

BY

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PREFACE

Almost every country presents among its physical features the case of some mountain range which serves as a great dividing line, a watershed for its river system. The springs which burst from the rocks on one side of the range are often found trickling down the mountain side, till gathering in force and flow they become a mighty stream, sweeping onward to the sea. Those on the other side flow down in different directions, draining another tract of country, to find themselves at last meeting the ocean with, it may be, the breadth of a whole continent between them and their fellows, with whom they started from almost the selfsame source. Any seemingly insignificant incident, such as the falling of a tree, a slight landslide in the vicinity of the divide, or even the tread of some wild thing's foot, may deflect either stream at its source and thus change its issue by thousands of miles.

The stream of human life is also challenged at its source by the alternative of a great divide. Unlike the mountain stream, it is dowered with

choice and gifted with the power of self-direction. Upon the choice it makes will its issue depend. Destiny pivots on the will. Right and wrong are rival candidates for its suffrage. These are the two alternatives, between which its choices lie, and with one or the other it must close. There is no neutrality possible, neither can any combination service be allowed. These alternatives, as they are accepted or rejected, divide men into two widely divergent groups and the twofold classification is strongly indicated in our Psalm. It runs down through all Revelation. It marks all Christ's teaching. He started His ministry by classifying men as wise and foolish, and He came to the close of His ministry without finding any reason for revising this twofold category. Wheat and chaff, good and evil, sheep and goats —into these two classes all humanity can be resolved, and with one or the other of these groups each individual must find a place.

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I

The Counsel of the Ungodly

This Threshold Psalm, as it might well be styled, is the crystallisation into poetry of both experience and observation. It cannot be determined who was its author. If, as some critics have judged, it was Solomon, then he was well qualified to write on the folly and futility of taking wrong tracks in the pursuit of happiness, for he had tried many. We owe a great debt even to those who have blundered when they thus leave behind them a record of experiments which they have tried and found to fail. If the experience of the ages could keep men from straying, then long ere this would the world have been holding to the highways of righteousness and heading for the City of God. In traversing the Australian bush, amid towering trees and tangled undergrowth, there often opens up off the main

track which the pioneer has cut, an inviting and fairly well-defined footway, which promises a short cut to one's destination. Many a time, the writer has been lured by such an opening and taken the turn, only, however, to discover that it led to some wild thing's lair and that he had to battle his way back, and often through the late night, torn with bramble and scrub to the spot from which he had strayed. Indeed, so frequently did this occur, that it became an unwritten law of the forest that when one had thus been misled into a dead-end, he should, on regaining the main track, split a hazel and insert within its cleft a notice with the warning word "No road this way," that others might not be similarly fooled.

This Psalm is just such a caution. The man who wrote it had seen many a traveller go down the wild-beast track—the track of the animal nature—in the search for happiness. If it were Solomon, he had been down himself, and now disappointed, disillusioned and morally damaged, he flings out this danger signal to all who come after him, that there are certain roads which seem right unto a man, but the ends thereof are the ways of death.

There are four great contrasts in this Psalm. Contrasted Choice, Contrasted Conduct, Contrasted Character and Contrasted Destiny. The relation between these is severely and inexorably logical. This Psalm makes every man the arbiter of his own fate—the captain of his own soul. It casts the onus of life's success or failure upon the individual will. The writer of this Psalm recognises the immense significance of environment. He assumes that a man inevitably takes the colour of the company that he voluntarily selects. There is true insight here, and all experience springs to its endorsement. Here is the perception and registration of the great law of moral assimilation—a law that holds possibilities both up and down for human life, of such transcendent magnitude as to smite the soul with speechless awe.

Love of the highest will mean association with the highest. Association will mean assimilation. Assimilation will mean eternal development and ever-growing likeness to God. What we "like," we come to "liken" by the working of a subtle but inevitable law. When our spirits thus meet and mingle with the Spirit of God and our love

for Him becomes supreme, we are "changed into the same image, from glory to glory, by the spirit which is the Lord."

If, however, on the other hand, our love runs low and fixes on the base and unworthy, then there, too, the law will work, "what is fine within us growing coarse to sympathise with clay." The love of evil will mean association with evil. Association will mean assimilation to the evil one, till we shall be changed into the same image, from vileness into vileness, as by the spirit of hell. Of course, care must be taken here to distinguish between associations that are deliberately chosen, and those which are thrust upon us by the necessities of an uncontrollable circumstance.

Our duty may compel us at times to associate with the unclean in life and speech, but as long as we react against and repel it—as long as the soul resents it and recoils from it—as long as it is an offence to us, and our whole manhood or womanhood gathers itself up in indignant protest against it, as a hateful and contaminating thing, we shall get no harm from it. On the contrary, by our very reaction against it, we shall gather in moral force and fibre. We shall be creative of an atmosphere that will not only disarm it of

evil to ourselves, but become morally hygienic toward others.

If, however, we stay in such company of choice, a moment longer than necessary—if we deliberately linger and loiter in the society of those who have no fear of God before their eyes, then we incur a risk that it is neither lawful nor safe for us to run. There is an incident recorded in the life of the Prince of Orange that finely illustrates this principle. In the conduct of one of his sieges, he was sitting on his horse directing operations, with the bullets of the besieged flying round him. A gentleman rode up to him with a letter which the prince hastily opened and read, then thanking his messenger, he turned again to his business. The gentleman, however, instead of retiring to a safe place, remained within the danger zone. The prince, observing him, pointed out the peril, to which he replied, "I run no greater risk than your Highness!" "No," said the prince, "but my duty requires me to stay here and yours does not." He had hardly spoken the word when a ball from the enemy's camp pierced the gentleman's heart and he fell lifeless to the ground. General Gordon held that a man was immortal till his work was done and that in the path of duty

he bore a charmed life. This is certainly true in the realm of morals, but when we deliberately expose ourselves to moral danger and expect to escape unharmed, we strain faith to the breaking point of presumption where it will meet with the rebuke that it deserves.

In this picture of the Blessed Life, the Psalmist first of all presents us with a certain background of negative qualities. "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the wicked, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful." By the "wicked" we are to understand those who have deliberately cut God out of their creed, and who order their lives as though their repudiation of His authority had caused Him to cease to be. But when a man cuts God out of life, he cannot stop there. He must go on to cut conscience out of his councils, and accountability out of his conduct, because apart from God, these have no adequate sanction or support. This cutting-out process destroys the sanctity and security of life. It so reacts on a man's whole being as to reduce its value as a social factor. A man is not of the same worth to society who repudiates those fundamental and integrating principles by which alone the well-being of

the social organism is secured. Indeed, he becomes a menace. In its own interests, society must repudiate the man who repudiates God, lest by a swift contagion he infect the mass. The elements that bind society into peace and prosperity are moral and these moral elements, if they are to retain their authority over the minds of men, must be shown to have their root and origin in the everlasting righteousness of a Personal God. A universal disbelief or even doubt as to the Divine existence, would at once depreciate all values. The worth of human life depends upon the reality, the richness and the durability of its relations. If it be merely a wave lifted for a brief moment into consciousness, only to sink back into the ocean of oblivion; if perception and reflection, memory and imagination, love and friendship, courage and fidelity, womanly tenderness, manly skill and little children's trust, all come to flower and fruit only to perish in the dust; if immortality be only a priest's fiction, a poet's fancy, a painter's dream; if we are simply flung out from impersonal matter by impersonal force to fall back again into the impersonal mass, what inducement is there to hold on and endure? There are no points in preserving consciousness

and keeping up this dance of molecules which constitute our separate existences, especially when the tune they play does not suit, and when by a single act we can stop the music, ring down the curtain and put out the lights. Where is the sense of holding on to so impoverished a thing as existence must then become, when pain like liquid fire is pouring through our nerves and smiting our lives apart?

The supreme test of a creed is how it works out in deed. What kind of character does it produce? "By their fruits ye shall know them," is as true of systems of belief as it is of individuals. Here is a test as simple as it is satisfactory. The wayfaring man can apply it though he may know nothing of horticulture. He can discern the difference between grapes and thorns and may be safely trusted not to confound thistles with figs. The belief that God is our Father, that we are the children of His heart and His home, that we came forth from Him and shall return to Him, that we shall find in Him the answer to all our longings, the solution of all our problems, and the fulfilment of all our hopes—this is the faith that has made the men that have made the world. Under its inspiration they have found the courage

to attempt, the power to achieve and the patience to endure. All the crystallised wisdom of the ages, that gathers itself up in prophecy or proverb or psalm, has been the outcome of this belief. The world has come thus far upon the onward way, because this has been the faith of her higher spirits in every age. This is the victorious music to which she has marched and the nations that have kept in step with the beat of its drum are the nations that have led the van in mental strength and moral power. Wherever a community has held this faith loosely, or allowed it to become obscured by absorption in material pursuits, it has lowered its vitality and made a bid for decay. The denial of God means the negation of duty and life with no sense of duty forfeits the right to be at large. Better bestow the freedom of the city on a mad dog than allow those who have no fear of God before their eyes to poison the mind, pervert the conscience and corrupt the morals of mankind.

Life with no sense of duty becomes a mockery to itself. It cannot come to fullest self-expression. It has no justification for continuance, and must be puzzled to know what to do with certain organic instincts which clamour for correlates

which earth and time cannot supply. We have hopes that outrun all worldly fulfilment, desires that exhaust all material sources of satisfaction and still cry out for more. We are conscious of potencies that outreach the stars, demanding the infinities for their reach and range. To accept the counsel of the ungodly as a guiding principle is to give the lie to all these. It is to shut the soul up in a mean and impoverished present with no past upon which to improve and with no future to inspire. What orphanage can be compared with this? To be hemmed in on every side by the cold mechanism of inflexible law, against which there can be lodged no appeal for redress, where no plea can be heard for pity, no place be found for prayer. Truly this is a counsel of despair! And to what dark depths of degradation it must sink the soul that listens to its doctrine the Psalmist would have us know that perchance he may turn our feet into the upward way.

The word "counsel" in our Psalm would seem to indicate the attitude to be one of deliberate determination after the *pros* and *cons* of the situation had been duly discussed. It was not that the question of God and their relation to Him with the obligations which it carried, had not occurred

to their minds. Neither was it that the matter, having been mooted, had been allowed to go by default, by "moving the previous question." The idea sought to be conveyed is that the matter had come up for debate, that a settled course of procedure had been agreed upon and that a resolution had been carried to leave God out of count and to order life without reference to His claims.

It is rather a striking coincidence that in the second Psalm we have just such a condition of things portrayed. "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together." It was a "league of nations," banded together in an unholy alliance for the deliberate purpose of renouncing allegiance to the Highest. It was a clear-cut and definite policy of repudiation—the loosening of life from all moral consideration and restraint that it might plunge neck-free into any and every wild excess of revelry and devilry. It was a "declaration of right" to do as they pleased, accountable to no one but themselves. And this, let it be noted, was no swift and sudden decision, born of heat or passion, but a calm, cool and considered course of conduct upon which they had resolved. Had it been simply a great reaction after some world-wide disaster under which the

universal mind had been stunned and staggered; if their faith had been strained to its breaking point and all their hopes of good shattered into fragments and scattered in dust, there might have been some extenuation. In the dark days of history, days of famine and flood, of battle and blood, when the earthly props on which we have leaned break under us, when fortunes fly and friends fail and the heart is sick with hope deferred; when the soul sits alone in the darkness and sighs for the "touch of a vanished hand and the sound of a voice that is still," there may be some allowance made if the overwrought spirit, vexed beyond endurance, rises up in wrath and protest against the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, demanding explanation or redress. But there is no such suggestion here, nothing to indicate that this revolt from law and order is the outcome of disaster that has shipwrecked their faith. Neither is it the uneducated, undisciplined masses of the people, the outcasts, the oppressed, writhing under the heel of tyranny and cursing the inequalities of fate that are here represented as questioning, as they might very well have done, the equity of God's dealings and making their evil lot an excuse for their apostacy. Nay, not with

these did this rebellion originate but with the kings and rulers and great ones of the earth. It has worked its way down from the palace to the populace. "Like Prince, like people" has been ever true and so, as Ben Jonson wisely warns us:

> "Princes that would their people should do well
> Should at themselves begin, as at the head.
> For men by their example pattern out
> Their imitations and regard for laws:
> A virtuous court, a world to virtue draws."

That this principle was at work in this old world society is clear from the structure of the Second Psalm. "Why do the heathen rage?" enquires the Psalmist. "Why do the people imagine a vain thing?" Then comes the answer which is a terrific indictment against the men in high places: "If you want to find the reason for all the seething discord and discontent of the crowd, the impatience of restraint, the unreasoning resentment against law and order that makes itself visible and vocal among the masses, look for it in their rulers, who, fools that they are, do not see that they are letting loose a monster that will turn and rend them." The crowd does not think, it only feels. It is swayed by impulses. What

opinions it holds it has taken ready-made from others. The abstract reasoning of their masters may be unintelligible to the many-headed mass, but even men who cannot follow the philosophy, can interpret the facts. Truth in the concrete, truth translated into action, truth embodied in history and working itself out in common life the man in the street can understand. He could not perhaps follow your reasoning through the proposition in Euclid which demonstrates that any two sides of a triangle are together greater than the third, but he would at once agree that he could cut across a field in less time than it would take him to walk around. Yet this is only saying the same thing in another way. He would perhaps stand aghast and bewildered if you asked him to believe that "every particle in nature attracts and is attracted by every other particle with a force proportional to the mass and inversely to the square of the distance," but he would readily grasp your meaning if you told him that a brick would fall on his head from the roof of a house with greater force than would a penny bun; and yet this is only the same great law, stated in simpler terms. Thus it comes to pass that when atheistic philosophy translates itself

from theory into practice, and men come to measure what they may do, by what they can do, so that "Might" spells "Right," then the crowd begins to understand it and following its instructors, seeks by "cornering" as much as may be of brute force, to bruise its way, regardless of all moral considerations, to the goals of ungoverned desire.

This is the futility and fatality of a godless philosophy; it becomes self-destructive. An Australian boomerang has been known to circle round till, in its returning flight, it has severed the jugular vein of the thrower from whom it received its initial impulse. One stands amazed at the superlative insolence which, while all the time dependent on God's bounty, consents to accept God's generous gift of life, together with all it carries of plenty and security, and yet presumes to repudiate His right to be either recognised or obeyed. But apart from the impertinence that would thus first accept and then abuse God's hospitality, I should like to lay bare the futility to which I have referred. The attempt to rule God out of life is as vain as an attempt would be to rule gravity out of matter. God simply declines to be dismissed. The sun does not cease

shining because a man closes his eyes to its light, and our blindness to God's presence must not be construed as the equivalent of His absence. His rulership does not depend upon a referendum, nor does the moral law rely for its continuance upon a show of hands. The revolt against law and order, both human and divine, which Russia has presented in our day and which is already recoiling on the misled millions of her people, supplies a striking comment on the truth we are discussing. Disrated, distrusted, dishonoured, she stands among the nations as a menacing centre of social and moral contagion. Her contact with other countries is proving such a peril to their civilisation, that in the interests of social sanitation and industrial efficiency the whole world round, it is becoming imperative that quarantine measures should be enforced against her till she can show a clean bill of health. Moral distempers are communicable and they work like a fever in the blood. The Russian revolutionaries who signified their contempt of authority by exterminating the royal house, seemed to think that they had dealt a fatal blow to law and order because they had assassinated their representatives. The Czar however, as is the case with every earthly ruler, was simply

a temporary symbol of an eternal principle. The symbol may perish and pass, as indeed all symbols must, but the qualities which are symbolised in kingship, howbeit imperfectly in the best of rulers, such as justice, truth, clemency and fair play to man and woman and little child, whether white or black, whether yellow or brown, these survive all the assaults of time and change. Even in Russia their hour will come, though it tarry. Amid all the wreckage of tottering thrones and falling kingdoms, truth and righteousness will hold on their victorious way till they have put down all rule and authority and power that exalts itself against the Lord and against His Anointed. And so we repeat, though men may rid themselves of the God-consciousness, they cannot get rid of the God-Fact. That abides unaltered and unalterable "when all that seems, has suffered shock."

Men, for example, may render themselves unconscious of physical light and sound, but the phenomena of light and sound are not thereby diminished or impaired. Their waves still break in beauty or in harmony on land and sea, though eyes be blind and ears be deaf. It is only childish

folly or grown-up conceit to suppose things exist only as they exist to us.

An Australian stood with me one morning near the Bank in London and as we watched the whirling traffic of that busy centre, he turned and said, "I cannot understand how all this can go on when I'm not here!" But it does! And so the great forces of the moral world whether we have the wit to regard them or not move along their predetermined course, casting down the mighty from their seats and exalting the humble and meek, for by daylight or by dark, God's judgments are always abroad in the earth. "His thunderbolts have eyes, to see their way home to the mark."

We have already referred to the law of physical gravity. Let us recur to it and expand the reference. Every builder in brick or stone is confronted with this law. It challenges him at every step. He cannot find a square inch upon the whole round earth where it does not rule. It is the law that demands uprightness in the world of things. It is a law that cannot be ignored. The would-be builder cannot bluff it nor bribe it into connivance or neutrality. He must have it either for him or against him in his work. It is an inspector that is always on duty, twenty-four

hours a day and seven days a week, silently testing his work, approving what is good and condemning what is bad. Nor is its approval or condemnation merely passive. It is actively on the side of the structure which is upright, upholding it with all its might, while against that which is out of plumb, it stretches out a million hands to lay it even with the dust. Now that this law of physical gravitation has its counterpart in the moral realm is clear from Christ's teaching in the Sermon on the Mount. The parable in which he contrasts the fortunes of the House on the Rock and that on the sand, sets forth the force of moral gravity at work on the structure of human character. We are all builders in this realm and have no choice. There are no unemployed in the moral realm. Build we must, after some fashion, and reckon we must with this uncompromising law. It is impossible of evasion. We must be either with it or against it. With it, we are secure; against it, we have not a hope. Christ and His teaching stood for this law and He employed its inevitableness to illustrate the contrasted destinies of those who obeyed or revolted from His rule. There is only one sure foundation for individual or national life and that is godliness. There is

only one sound basis for morals, and that is religion. There is only one sanction and security for the Brotherhood of Man, and that is the Fatherhood of God. Any individual or system, any organisation or combination that starts out by ignoring God is looking for trouble and heading for ruin. The fortune of every social structure upreared by the hand of man will turn on its loyalty to God and its obedience to Christ. Speaking of Christ's inevitable supremacy, the Apostle Paul declares "He shall abolish all rule and all authority and power, for he must reign till he hath put all his enemies under his feet."

Men may build themselves into guilds, fraternities, boards of trade, trades unions, chambers of commerce, in fact into every kind of combine, but unless the structural principle of their edifice be loyalty to God and obedience to the moral law, they are building on sand and their structure is foredoomed. To such a building, God's law is not simply neutral, it is positively hostile—hostile as gravity to the wall that is not plumb. Every human fraternity that ignores the Divine paternity will be consumed with the breath of His mouth and the brightness of His coming. He refuses to be counted out of our concerns. Come in He must and will, either as a binding or disrup-

tive force, and every social or political institution, that either positively cuts Him out of its counsels or negatively ignores Him, will be swept into the same category and classed with the morally unfit. They are alike rooted in selfishness. But selfishness is anti-Christian and that which is anti-Christian is anti-social. The Gospel of Jesus holds the solution of all our social problems because it strikes at selfishness which is the root of all. Never until men consent to accept the Golden Rule, can they bring in the Golden Age. Till then, there will be mutual hate, suspicion, exploitation, and all the black brood of evils that spring inevitably out of neglect or negation of God. It will be noted that the Revisers have substituted the word "wicked" for the word "ungodly" in this verse. The change is deeply significant and suggests what is notoriously true, that the mere negative position of ungodliness cannot be indefinitely sustained. In morals, all such negative situations tend by a swift and inevitable logic to resolve themselves into positive attitudes, so that as we shall see the man who begins by assimilating the counsels of the ungodly, will presently be found translating these counsels into positive and practical terms and taking his stand with sinful men.

II

Nor Standeth in the Way of Sinners

The mere negative attitude of ungodliness is here seen passing into its positive stage. This, as we have seen, was inevitable. There is some subtle force at work which develops the negative situation ultimately into one of positive hostility. Moments come which demand an instant and clean-cut decision. At such times, any attempt to hedge, or take refuge in no-man's land breaks itself to pieces against the moral imperative which compels us to take sides. In such a case, there is no neutrality possible, nor can any combination service be allowed. The position taken up by the ungodly, analyses into objection to authority. It is a spirit of rebellion against restraint and of repudiation of any responsibility excepting to one's self. Nor would this be so bad if it were the better self before which one's choices and motives were arraigned. But alas! the war against authority is not only waged outwardly, but inwardly. It is carried back behind the lines.

The strife becomes internecine. It divides the man against himself, so that the sword is turned against that organic instinct within the breast that dares to speak for God and duty against the clamour of desire. Thus it comes to pass that he who becomes ungodly, renders himself by so much less a man. The grand distinctive mark of manhood is the sense of accountability, first of all to conscience here, and then to the God of conscience hereafter. To discredit conscience is to stand discrowned. It is to renounce one's higher nature and to step downward in the scale of being. It is to hand life over to the rule of brute instinct and blind passion. It is to revert to the stage of

> . . . the beast that takes
> His license in the fields of time,
> Unfettered by the sense of crime,
> In whom a conscience never wakes.

Nor does this emancipation of one's self from the consciousness of God and from the sense of accountability in any way relieve life of pressure or effect for it any escape from the necessity of service. All it does is to substitute an impersonal for a personal master. Instead of postulating at the centre of things a mind that thinks and plans

for us, and a heart that feels and loves, it enthrones cold, dead, unfeeling law. It deifies a blind force moving relentlessly in all realms, forgiving no transgressions, overlooking no mistakes, making no distinction between inadvertence and intent—a force that can neither be touched to compassion nor moved by prayer. This is the ideal world which the counsel of the ungodly creates for itself and in which, let it be noted, they do not escape service, but merely change masters, renouncing allegiance to the law of love in order to live their lives under the lash of law. This is the grim irony of the situation, that whereas this course has been adopted by the ungodly for the express purpose of escaping from authority, they find themselves in the clutch of a more adamantine system still, where nothing but the most relentless authority meets and masters them at every step, where law is never tempered by grace, justice never mitigated by mercy and the Nemesis of retribution is forever on their trail.

To walk in such counsel is to cut life away from its only adequate sanction and support, emptying it of all those contents that refuse to be classified as merely material actions and reactions. It is a theory which to be logical must

do violence to the deepest intuitions and give the lie to

"Those mighty hopes that make us men."

It repudiates the imperatives of duty and reduces responsibility to a fancy-fed figment of the imagination—an imposition, in short, practised by the knowing ones upon the simple, and putting a weapon into the hands of knaves by which to secure the obedience of fools.

Now, the trouble with all this is, that it cannot be held as a theory, without tending irresistibly to work out in practice. It is this inevitableness that was so clear to the Psalmist's mind. He could see that the man who walked in the counsel of the ungodly and adopted an ideal of life and conduct which deliberately excluded the thought of God, would speedily make his outer world of conduct correspond with his inner life of thought. There is always an interaction, conscious or unconscious, going on between belief and behaviour, between creed and conduct. It is really the law which we find at work everywhere in nature making for balance. The keel of a ship cleaves a furrow in the deep, but the surrounding waters rush in to restore the level. The rarefied air

rises from the lighted candle and the cool air flows in to take its place. Your hand grasps the cold metal of the door handle, but its coolness and your warmth come to a mean temperature. So it is in the world of thought and action. There is always a tendency to equilibrium, and when a man refuses to bring his conduct up to the level of his creed, he invariably sets about reducing his creed to the level of his conduct. This is ever the history of theoretical ungodliness and if our analysis be correct, behind this bad counsel referred to in our Psalm, there was a history of moral defection of which it was the result. The belief in God is part of a man's mental and moral make-up. It is something which he starts out with as his natural equipment, the portion of goods that falls to him by right of inheritance, his original stock-in-trade. The tendency of the race has never been to atheism but rather to polytheism. It may be safely said that men do not become atheists by nature but by art, and by an art that is at perpetual quarrel with nature. Atheism is seldom mental, so seldom, indeed, as to be a negligible quantity. It is mostly moral. It is the miasma that rises from what the Apostle calls "an evil heart of unbelief" to cloud the mind and confuse

the judgment. It results in developing a personal equation which both violates the faculty of moral discrimination and weakens the power of moral determination. This is what Paul meant when he wrote, "Because they refused to have God in their knowledge, God gave them up unto a reprobate mind to do those things which are not fitting." Similarly it is written "The fool hath said in his heart, there is no God," the fact being that he said it because he was a fool—a de-mentalised, through being a demoralised man. The word translated "fool" suggests this. It is derived from the Hebrew word "to wither." It is the man whose faculty for God has withered and died down through neglect, who presumes to deny the divine existence. His verdict is as valuable as that of a withered optic nerve on the question of light. It is a confounding of God's objective reality with man's subjective ability to discern Him, as though the existence of God depended upon its recognition by man. Denial of God, or even a cherished doubt as to His being and claims, necessarily reacts on character. It lays an axe at the roots of law and order, for all earthly authority can enforce itself only as it is recognised as deriving itself from the higher authority of the

skies. Put a note of interrogation after the latter and straightway everything in the former is at a loose end. Is not this precisely the condition of things prevailing to-day? Irresponsibility is in the very air. There is a general lowering of standards and flouting of authority, a contempt for law and an impatience of restriction, a resentment of restraint resulting in an all-round deterioration of character and conduct. This is not a pulpit Jeremiad. It is a public press opinion, calmly reasoned and expressed with no particular bias of any theological kind. Take the following from the "New York Times" of recent date, and let the United States government ask itself whether, if it requires moral decency and self-control on the part of its citizens, it ought not to make proper provision for moral and religious teaching with adequate sanctions in its schools:

"Not only are crime conditions throughout the nation worse than they have been in three decades, but Eastern cities are threatened with a still greater increase in crimes of violence by bands of Western criminals who are headed eastward, having been foiled in the West by vigilance committees, according to a statement issued yesterday

by William B. Joyce, Chairman of the National Surety Company.

"Mr. Joyce, who has studied crime conditions throughout his thirty-five years' connection with the surety company, said that never in the history of that company had its losses been greater in ratio and number, or crimes, particularly those of a violent character, more numerous than they are now. He issued his statement, he said, as a warning to the police to prepare for the influx of Western criminals, and, while he did not think it necessary to form vigilance committees here just yet, he expressed the opinion that it 'may come to that.'

" 'Something must be done and done quickly,' said Mr. Joyce. 'The National Crime Commission could, of course, be of great help, but it is hardly organised and in working order as yet, and we need quick protection. In all my experience with crime I have never seen anything even approaching crime conditions as they are in the United States to-day.'

"Mr. Joyce intimated it might soon become necessary to get together in this city a corps of expert marksmen to combat the horde of Western criminals he believes are on their way here. Asked

why he felt sure the criminals were eastward bound, Mr. Joyce said:

" 'Criminals will not go to work and when certain localities are made too hot for them they simply pack up and move on elsewhere where the picking is easier. Of course, we in the Eastern States have well organised bodies of police, but most of these bank crimes are committed by experienced men of a most desperate character who must be dealt with on the spot. In many instances before the police can be notified such robbers have done their work and made their escape.' "

There can be no national stability apart from morality. There can be no permanent morality apart from religion and there can be no adequate authority for religion apart from the revealed will of God. The Bible is the children's birthright and it is only as its vital and vitalising truths are incorporated in our family, our social, our political and our industrial life that the national pulse can beat strong or the tide of our life run high.

Belief in God and in His Son, Jesus Christ, with all that belief connotes, is the first grand necessity for national security. Not a mere mental assent to these things as intellectual proposi-

tions, but moral consent to their claims. This alone can gird us with the courage to dare and the strength to endure. To profess our belief in God merely as an intellectual proposition, while we withhold from Him our allegiance, is to put our conduct at quarrel with our creed and to play the fool. This is to be an "atheist" in the New Testament sense of the word. It is to be "without God and without hope in the world." Even the heathen who have never known His Name, but are loyal to the light they have are in a better case. Condemnation by God is not going to set in on any man's failure to subscribe intellectually to this or that set of doctrinal beliefs. It will not turn even on his believing everything contained in the Scriptures, but on his loyalty to the best he knows, whether revealed from within or without. The supreme question for each one of us is, do we respond to that best whenever we meet it, whether in picture, in poetry, in prose or in personality? If we do, if we acknowledge the claim of the Highest, when that Highest is revealed, if we uncover in its presence, if we prostrate ourselves before it and confess it as divine, if we give ourselves up to it, body, soul and spirit, to be ruled by it at all times, in

all places and to all issues, then and then only are we justified; while to oppose that, to disobey that, even to ignore that, is to stand irrevocably condemned. God has built into the structure of every man's constitution, the eternal standards of truth and righteousness. We carry about with us wherever we go, an indestructible revelation of the divine. We may resent it, resist it, abuse and violate it by all ignoble use, but there it stands, calm and insistent, a living and luminous witness to God and duty. However mistaken men's opinions may be about right and wrong, and however different their interpretations of the inner voice which is to them the voice of God, if there be the will to do His will and to follow the gleam, it will be counted to them for righteousness, and upon all such will be bestowed the freedom of the City of God.

Now, Jesus Christ is the focal point where all the rays of revealed truth, whether in prophecy, or psalm, or personality, meet and find their concentrated radiance. To know Him, to understand Him, to love Him with all the heart and soul and mind and strength, this is the supreme blessedness that gladdens time, gives meaning to life and glorifies eternity.

We have already seen that ungodliness is the starting point of sin. It is the negative condition which resolves itself by an evil logic into an attitude of positive hostility to God and His claims. It is impatience of restraint, breaking bounds and passing into actual transgression. It might be asked "Is not the man already a sinner who has taken up the mental and moral attitude involved in the term 'ungodliness' and is it not somewhat fanciful for the Psalmist to set up a distinction between the two, by making the second appear as an advance on the first?" There can be no question that he does suggest a gradation between "ungodly" and "sinners" and "scornful" and if there were any doubt about it, it would be dispelled by the unmistakable gradation in the verbs "walketh," "standeth," "sitteth." The more we look into this passage the deeper grows the conviction that the word "sinners" must be construed in corporate terms. The whole trend of the Psalmist's thought seems to show that the sinfulness here referred to does not relate merely to individual transgression—some sudden lapse from virtue in some black hour of temptation and as suddenly revolted from with loathing and self-disgust. We are compelled to construe the situa-

tion through the word "counsel" which we have already seen as controlling the interpretation of ungodliness. This makes it the result of a deliberate policy adopted after calm discussion and cool calculation of cost. This gives quite a different aspect to the term and compels us to regard the position thus taken up as one of organised rebellion on the part of a corporate body. The picture suggested is that of the ungodly man coming out of the deliberative assembly in company with other kindred souls who have ruled God out of their creed, and with whom he is now prepared to stand in, for the purpose of giving practical effect to the negation of God upon which they have collectively resolved. Now sin, thus considered as a definite policy of moral disruption, adopted by those who join hand in hand to work unrighteousness, is a very much more difficult and complex problem with which to deal than that of mere personal deviation.

Here is a vitiated atmosphere with which to cope, corrupted standards with which to reckon, and a sinister *esprit-de-corps* to be faced, generated by evil association under that lawless spirit which has wrought itself into the moral history of the race and turned its Edens into burnt and barren

wastes. It is the spirit of disobedience, not only become incarnate in individual lives, but organising those lives into societies, institutions and combines, established for the set purpose of undermining authority, contaminating conscience and generally polluting the springs of personal, domestic, industrial and national life. The Day of Pentecost, with its baptism of purifying power has thus its evil counterpart in a Devil's pentecost in which his disciples, wrought into one accord under his malign influence, become baptised with his spirit and inspired to work their deeds of social wreckage and incendiary hate.

The sooner the Christian church wakes up to the fact of this menacing combine, the sooner will she realise the necessity for ending her quarrels, healing her divisions and closing her ranks. This evil confederation is everywhere gathering in force. We have infinitely more to fear from it than from the peril of war. It was this, indeed, in the late world-struggle that weakened our arms in the hour of battle and postponed the day of peace. Even if the Allies had gone down in the late war, their honour would have gone up. But if we go down, slain by our drunkenness and uncleanness, then our honour will perish, our memory

will rot and our glory be trodden in the dust. Let every one of us be warned against association or complicity with any club, guild or fraternity that exalts itself against God, that organises itself against Jesus Christ or repudiates His claims.

There is a widely spread and highly organised socialistic system that has its home in Europe but is becoming naturalised throughout the world. It is a system conceived in antagonism to Christianity and framed with the deliberate intention of defeating the aims of Christ and His church. The ideals that are thus repudiated by this extreme socialistic school are those that have created the freedom, the civilisation, the intellectual life and all the most potent forces that have been making for the elevation and betterment of mankind. The literature of this school floods the markets and is lowering all the standards of decent living. Its propaganda is a disintegrating element which, unless counteracted, will lay our western civilisation in the dust. What kind of a system must that be which requires from its supporters as a condition of their enrolment, the denial of God and repudiation of Christ? Does any workingman for a moment dream that his emancipation

can come by turning his back on that Christ who lived and loved and laboured and suffered and died to make men brothers the whole world round?

Professor Hudson, the American historian of the Renascence, has shown that this great movement was the emancipation of the individual from ecclesiastical fetters. He points out that it was initiated by the workingmen of Florence. In that busy industrial centre, it awoke and gathered itself up in mighty power. It was the workingman of that age who threw off the monstrous tyranny of ecclesiasticism which, like Sindbad's "old man of the sea," had bestridden and was threatening to strangle the life of the world. It was the workingman who struck a blow from which that tyranny is staggering to-day. But is the workingman going back into serfdom again? Can he not see that the anti-Christian socialism which seeks to disciple him, must prove fatal to the true development of the individual because it is the supreme expression of despotism? It appeals to the independence of the workingman, only to coerce him into a slavery as debasing in its effects as it is brutal and unreasoning in its methods. Under its iron heel he is bruised

into anonymity. He must not dare to act out his own true self. He must be part of a great industrial machine and a standardised part at that, with no individuality. He must not do his best in the matter of work, but must move at the pace prescribed by the controllers of the machine. He must stultify himself and violate his own self-respect by becoming the mere creature of another's will, the instrument of a force that robs him of the right of self-expression. Thus the so-called labour-movement of our day is in peril of being exploited by public agitators for private ends. What might become an untold power for goodness, if directed by godly men and baptised into the spirit of Christ, will, if controlled by the spirit of a Marx or a Moses Baritz, become a self-destroying force that, if allowed to work unhindered, will undo the work of centuries and turn all the dearly bought gains of the working classes to dust and ashes in their hands.

As to how far the Christian church herself is responsible for these reactions against her, through failure to present a full-orbed Gospel, might very profitably be considered. Much of the modern teaching in certain schools of socialistic thought, owes all that is best in it to the teachings

of Christ and His Apostles. Were it not for the atmosphere of freedom and tolerance, of sweetness and light generated by centuries of Christian teaching, they could not find the security in which to formulate and propagate what they are pleased to call their new ideals of brotherhood and betterment. Whenever I hear these claims put forth, either within the church or outside, of having discovered a new Gospel, I am reminded of a "down-and-out" Australian who, at his wit's end to make a living, claimed to have discovered a new illuminant. According to his prospectus, the electric light was not going to get a look-in, while as for ordinary gas, it would be associated in the mind with the dark ages of the world. He gave a demonstration first of all before a number of the elect, consisting of supernumerary ministers who are always ready to invest loose cash in any wild-cat scheme that promises quick and fabulous returns. They came, they saw and were ensnared. They read their Bibles, so to speak, by the aid of this new light and straightway parted with their money and took up their shares. Before launching his project on a clamorous public, however, the promoter felt it would be well to rope in a number of wealthy laymen of the church. Among

those who responded was the chief officer in my own church, a shrewd, hard-headed but humorous North of Ireland man. The demonstration was in progress when he arrived and he immediately drew attention to the amount of smell and smoke with which it was attended. This, the inventor explained, was due to the crude conditions under which he had been compelled to work, but which would all disappear with the erection of the perfect and permanent plant. As the demonstration continued, my friend observed a pipe entering the gasometer which appeared to have no connection with the retort. He followed the track of this pipe into another room, where he observed it ran into the metre of the local gas company, the tap of which was full on. Not thinking, of course, that if he turned it off it would make any difference to the demonstration in the next room, he did so, whereupon there was total darkness in a few moments and great consternation, coupled with the sudden disappearance of the demonstrator. On investigation, it was found that all the illumination was coming from the local company's supplies and that only the "smoke" and the "smell" were being supplied by the alleged inventor. "Which things are an allegory"!

III

The Seat of the Scornful

We now pass to the study of a yet lower deep of moral descent than that indicated by the word sinners, viz., the "scornful." Grade by descending grade, the degeneration deepens till a condition is reached in which the unhappy soul has not only cut itself off from divine re-inforcement, like the "ungodly," nor been lured into an evil combine like the "sinners," but has taken up a settled attitude with the "scornful" who scoff at goodness, make a jest of religion and turn to ridicule the most deeply sacred things of life. It is a mood of flippant irresponsibility which refuses to be in earnest—the temper of the trifler that takes nothing seriously but regards life and all its sanctities as a mere farce, on which after being played out, death rings down the curtain and clears the stage. He who descends to this depth has not merely broken with goodness, he discounts it, derides it, denies indeed its real existence, and mockingly defiles the fair fame of such as have

kept their garments white and clean. Unprepared to purge himself that he may rank with them, he besmirches them that they may seem to rank with him. Only thus can a creature so splendidly endowed as man reconcile himself to a process of moral decline. He takes the devil's own delight in a good man's fall. If he cannot justify himself, he will find at least some compensation in condemning others and proving, to his own satisfaction at any rate, that he is no worse than his neighbours, the only difference being that he makes no profession of godliness and they do. He cynically declares that he has no use for religious people, and welcomes every colourable pretext for indulging in the sneer, as compendious as it is contemptible, that every man has his price; that virtue is merely an affectation; that honesty is a pretence and human goodness nothing but a name. Now it is one thing for a man to take up this extreme position out of disappointment and disillusion, as a result of having been victimised by some pretender who has employed a profession of godliness for the purpose of gaining a confidence which he has betrayed. It is quite another thing, however, to have evolved to this stage from within and as a result of one's own moral dete-

rioration and decay. The one is a healthy recoil from hypocrisy, under the influence of which the victim is naturally and for a time suspicious of all religious profession and ready to conclude all men liars and knaves, with church members at the bottom of the scale. But from this attitude, the healthy moral nature speedily reacts. It finds too much real goodness in the world to render such an extreme position permanently tenable. Moreover, to such a soul the unmasking of pretence comes as a shock, hurtful as it is hateful, and no one is more thankful than he to have his hurt healed and his confidence in human nature restored.

Not so, however, with the class under discussion. Instead of unmasking badness, they are more concerned with defacing goodness, casting the shade of suspicion across the fairest reputations, chuckling suggestively at every mention of honour, curling a contemptuous lip when fidelity is praised, holding duty in derision and God in defiance, despising authority and flouting law.

Now once a man sits down in such company as this, he becomes a dweller in a morally infected area, and in turn a centre of contagion. There must have been some such thought in the minds of

the scholars to whom we owe the Septuagint or Greek version of these Hebrew Scriptures. As you will remember, this translation was made about two hundred and fifty years before Christ, by seventy learned men who met for the purpose at Alexandria. It was done because Greek, in all countries surrounding the Mediterranean, had become the prevailing tongue. Inasmuch as the Jews had become scattered everywhere throughout the great commercial centres of the world, thus making it difficult, if not impossible, to keep up their knowledge and use of the Hebrew tongue, they were thus put in possession of their Scriptures in what had become a universal language. I refer to this because in the attempt of these scholars to translate the Hebrew word for "scornful" into its Greek equivalent, they have rendered it by a word which means "plague" or "pestilence." From this it is clear that it was the baleful influence of this class upon which the emphasis is sought to be placed. The scornful company was a plague-stricken centre, a tainted atmosphere, an infected area, in breathing which a man ran the risk of contracting a deadly moral disease. Now, apart altogether from any question as to the accuracy of this translation, there can be

no possible doubt as to the accuracy of the diagnosis. Whatever comparative philology may have to say about it, sound psychology confirms it as indisputably true. The spirit of the scorner breeds contagion, and here again let it be pointed out that it is not the scornful as an individual that is being designated, but as a class and in concert. It is the plural that is employed in each of these descriptions and this is deeply significant. We have seen how the terms "ungodly" and "sinners" were both controlled by the idea expressed in the word "counsel," in the sense that in each case it was a reasoned policy that had been adopted after due deliberation and not some insurgent impulse, acted upon under the stress of a sudden temptation. This is still further sought to be conveyed by the use of the word "way" in relation to sinners and which means here a deliberately chosen course of action or manner of life. Again it is further suggested by the word "seat" in relation to the scornful—a term which carries the idea of a session or conclave, such as we express in the phrase "seat of government." It is a body of men so given over to the power and practice of evil that they meet in concert to express their contempt of God and their derision of His laws.

Now this kind of thing, of necessity, becomes creative of atmosphere. It generates a poisonous gas which permeates and infects every department of conduct, every relationship of life.

When the great basic truths and convictions of life are ridiculed—when a man's deepest obligations are held up to scorn—when conscience is laughed out of court as obsolete, and all high sentiment is treated with contempt, there sets in a general rot, an all-round deterioration of character and conduct which propagates itself by an inevitable law. To sit in such company is to breathe a vitiated air, whose moral toxine enters into the very blood and poisons all the springs of life. Like some malignant growth in the individual body, it is not content with quiescence, it must become active and aggressive. Just as a cancer lays infecting fingers on contiguous healthy cells and corrupts them, so this disease centre in the body social seeks to break down healthy moral tissue in its vicinity till the corporate faith and hope and love are smitten with its rottenness and the very faculty for God and goodness becomes impaired. Clearly then, it must have been this inevitable tendency which suggested to the translators of the Septuagint the idea of construing

the Hebrew word for "scornful" into the terms of a contagious bodily disease. It makes a startling picture. *A seat of contagion!* Who would wittingly or willingly occupy a seat in the company of men infected with smallpox or bubonic plague? Yet this would be but a trifling risk compared with that incurred by association with the type that is here described. For here is an atmosphere not only exhausted of God and goodness, but positively charged with their moral opposites—an atmosphere miasmic, mephitic, which smites the soul that breathes it with paralysis of all its higher powers.

The sense of rapturous wonder, the spirit of reverence, the instinct of worship, the feeling of awe that hushes the voices of time and floods the inner sanctities with the music of another and a higher world—these all wither and die down where the air is full of mocking and the crackling laughter of fools. The spirit of mocking and the spirit of reverence can never coexist. They are mutually exclusive. But reverence is the root principle of all that is truest and best in individual and national life. It supplies law with its sanction and love with its appropriate soil. Where there is no reverence, law becomes a futility and

it is only as love is deeply rooted in reverence that it can keep its virgin purity and strength. A life that is defiant of law, defective in duty and deficient of love through want of reverence for the supreme, becomes a mockery to itself and a menace to the state.

Apart altogether from any religious or other-world consideration, the scornful mood stands condemned. It cheapens life by emptying it of its moral contents. It lowers a man's value as a mere working force here and now. On the plane of earth and time, a man does not count for as much, who cherishes the mocking mood. People decline to take him seriously, who takes all things as a jest. The spirit of raillery and scorn runs to earth all the currents of fine sentiment; it coarsens the fibre. Your finely grained man never scoffs. He never sneers at another's faith, however grotesque and rudimentary that faith may be. He will tread the floor of a Mohammedan mosque, a Buddhist temple, or a Chinese Joss-house with as reverent a spirit as he will uncover in Westminster Abbey or St. Paul's.

Better be the most degraded dirt-eating negro that ever worshipped a fetish, than the man who would laugh at him for doing it. That fetish

represents the best and highest the worshipper knows, and in any case we are not likely to convince him of the superiority of our faith, if it prompts or even permits us to ridicule his.

By holding all things, even the most sacred, up to ridicule, it puts man at quarrel with the nature of things. Nothing could be more out of harmony with the spirit of the universe than flippancy. Nature is keyed to the note of seriousness and she has no time for the scoffer. He that would enter into her secrets must approach her with reverent mind, with meek and lowly heart. To chatter trifles in her presence, is to seal her lips. We must keep silence before her if we would listen to her voice. Only to those who revere, those who come to her in the spirit of deep and earnest enquiry will she unveil her mysteries, so that to know the blessedness of discovery even in the realm of nature, men must hold their peace and bow the knee. When, however, other-world considerations are brought into account, and the thoughts and feelings of men are viewed in the white radiance of that light which beats from eternity on all the things of time, it becomes startlingly clear how far from the blessed life is the course of the scorner, whose footsteps we have

traced. It is a course that runs counter to all that is deepest and truest in human consciousness. It has to keep up a perpetual feud with the innate desire for God, which has been wrought into the very warp and woof of our mental and moral being. A man, to have reached the stage we have been describing, must not only have torn himself in twain, but have flung away his nobler part. But though a man may thus effect a temporary division of himself and take sides with his lower as against his higher self, he cannot be at peace. Here is no path to blessedness, but rather a swift and sloping passage to the dead-end of despair. But, paradoxical as it may appear, in this very despair lies the one and only hope of the scorner's reaction and return to God. The fact is that the higher side of man's nature, though discredited, dishonoured and discrowned, never renounces its right to reign. It never takes its dethronement lying done. It bides its time for it knows its hour will come. It can afford to wait for the moment of disillusionment, when the sceptre will again pass into its hand. It has memories of God and associations with goodness which are inwoven with the very fibres of heart and brain. It has a moral inheritance in the way of divine inten-

tion and holy impulse, whose life history runs back through all the generations to their source and fount in the mind and heart of God. Because of this, because a man can never disinherit himself of his moral instincts and demands, he can find no permanent peace when these are violated or ignored.

There never can be any blessedness when life is divided against itself, and godliness is the only way by which it can be unified. It is the only thing that provides for the all-round correspondence of man with his complete and completing environment, human and divine. That is only a narrow and impoverished interpretation of the godly life which regards it as concerned merely with its obligations to the Father in Heaven and forgets its relation to the duties of earth and time. Godliness is a term that covers the whole field of duty, secular and sacred, personal and domestic, literary and scientific, professional and political, commercial and industrial; in fact, everything that relates to our complete and many-sided life. Any narrower view of religion dishonours God and by so much discredits man. It is because so many teachers have thus impoverished the idea of godliness by restricting its function and field

to another world, that they have unwittingly played into the hands of the scoffer and driven men into his ranks. Then again, by their inconsistency of life, many professedly godly men have helped to multiply the scorner type. Paul pointed out in his day that professedly religious Jews were bringing the name of God into contempt by their notoriously irreligious lives. "The name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you." The world is justifiably suspicious of men whose religion expends itself in pious expletives and has no energy left to pay its debts, or of those who seek to make up for short weights by offering long prayers. But this does not justify scoffing at religion itself. If it could be shown that a man's religion sanctioned his inconsistencies and condoned his offences, it would be quite another matter. But this is a little task that I do not remember having been undertaken by the most blatant unbelief. As a matter of fact, if a man were out to make an attack on hypocrisy and wished to point his arrows with the sharpest epithets, he would have to borrow the language of Jesus or Paul. The inconsistencies of Christian professors, and God knows there are none of us who can claim immunity, give the scorner no

excuse for scoffing at the Christian faith. He might as well scoff at magnetism because he had been fooled by the deflection of a compass, or sneer at a plumb-line because of walls that are built out of true, as rail at God and religion because of the insincere. The eternal standards of truth and righteousness remain, however false men may prove to them. And it is with these standards and not with their defective human exponents that we have each to deal.

For all his mocking mood, however, there must come moments when the mind of the scorner gets turned inward on itself and he is made aware that he is playing false to the best he knows. It is this consciousness, forced upon him in his better moments by the Spirit of truth, that he is violating his higher nature, desecrating the holy of holies within his breast, and stifling the "still small voice," that makes the inner life of the scorner a troubled sea, casting up mire and dirt. It is really this reflex result on moral character that is so appalling, and it is this with which the Psalmist is concerned. Let us be warned against catching this spirit, for it spreads by a swift contagion from almost unconscious beginnings. It is so easy to get into the way of jesting about sacred

things. We mean no harm, but the tendency grows from more to more by insensible degrees till, unless corrected, it vulgarises all we touch. The seat of the scorner is reached by such very easy grades that our author would arrest us at the start with his warning word, which may well be taken as the keynote of our Psalm and paraphrased into "Ponder the path of your feet."

IV

But His Delight Is in the Law of the Lord

The Psalmist here passes from the negative to the positive side of the blessed life. Up till now it has been simply a catalogue of negatives. Of course, it is a great thing for a man to refrain from evil practices, but unless his life finds positive expression in active service, playing out its potencies into the field of human relations, it remains an unfulfilled prophecy, an arrested development, a self-centred and thereby a dead-centred force. The demand is for righteousness and no number of self-imposed restraints, though we might multiply them a million-fold, could fill the bill. Mere abstinence from evil, however total or continuous, will not get life anywhere. Better that it should break bounds and go wrong than do nothing and go nowhere. Every one who has had to do with rescue work will agree that there is far more hope in dealing with a life strongly heading in a wrong direction than with

one that is at a standstill, or drifting like a rudderless craft and without any propelling power upon the waters of time.

Life that is denied expression will "grow in," as it cannot grow out, and achieve its own defeat. Like the power of a coiled-up spring, its forces, unless liberated and expended in work, will lose their elasticity and die down into inertia. Energy must find expression and religion is not a system for the binding back of power, but for the loosening of it and letting it go. The godly life is the God-like life but the life of God is forever articulating itself in myriad forms of beauty and utility. All nature is simply a breaking forth into expression of His mind and heart. The Spirit of the universe becomes vocal in wind and wave, in murmuring brook and singing bird. Everywhere it seems to come to manifestation. The advancing and retreating seasons, the great march-past of the starry hosts across the field of night, the storm king pelting the earth with hail, shattering the air with thunder and writing his credentials in lightning letters across the bosom of the cloud; the tenderness of the dawn, the gold and crimson splendour of the dying day—these and ten thousand sights and sounds are the visions

and voices of a God who is everywhere and always unveiling himself and desiring to be known. Godliness provides life with a field that is a perpetual challenge to its powers. Here are undiscovered regions that beckon the explorer and an arena for the display of heroic endurance and achievement with which nothing else in the whole world can compare. Courage, enterprise, initiative, invention, patience, self-sacrifice, everything that the mind can crave, or the heart can love, or the spirit of adventure desire, can find its fitting field for the fullest functioning of its powers in the freedom of a godly life. It is a life that commandeers every quality of hand and heart and brain, yokes up all the forces of body, soul and spirit, takes up every moment of time and every ounce of energy that it may turn them all outward in terms of sacrificial service, while at the same time it acts reflexively on personal character within and lifts it to its highest power. Here then, is a majestic and positive life, full of force and freshness, to which we are beckoned and which is as far removed from the stagnation of monastic repression as are the mighty tides of ocean from the lazy-locked lagoon.

The godly man is the man in whose personality

the will of God becomes so instituted and organised as to find for itself working expression through all his functions. In Paul's phrase, "his members are yielded to God as instruments of righteousness." Righteousness, in the sense of moral energy, operating through human instrumentation, is the active force upon which God relies for the extension of His Kingdom. It is the "law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus" not merely exerting itself inwardly and freeing the individual from the "law of sin and death," but reacting outwardly in the way of moral and social reconstruction, on the kingdom of men.

The presence of such a man is as pungent, as penetrative, as pervasive in its saving energy as salt. He is not merely saved but saving, not only pure but purifying. He creates an atmosphere of moral ozone. His coming into any circle is a quickening breath, like a fresh breeze from the sea on a sultry day. Even the servants of the house do their work better when such a radiant personality is around.

The story is told of Thomas Cook, the great English evangelist, that on one occasion when he was about to conduct a mission in a certain town, great preparation for his coming was made in the

home where he was to be an honoured guest. During these days, one of the maids of the house came somewhat flustered into the shop of the family butcher in order to make a purchase. The salesman, noticing that she was a bit put out, asked the reason, to which she petulantly replied, "Oh, one would think that the Lord Jesus Christ Himself was coming to stay with us, there is such a fuss being made!" Mr. Cook came and stayed and went. A day or two after he had gone, the maid found herself once more at the butcher's counter. Looking at the salesman she said, "You remember I told you that from the fuss that was being made, you might have thought that the Lord Jesus Christ was coming to our house?" "I do," said the salesman. "Well," said the girl, "He's been!"

Such a life becomes the radiant centre of sweet and wholesome forces which stream forth from a heart in which God sits enthroned and from which wave after wave of health-giving energy pours, to comfort the sad, to reinforce the weak and to heal the broken in heart. This is infinitely more than mere blamelessness or subjective righteousness. It is powerfully objective. It is uprightness in action "with seed in itself after its kind."

It is reproductive of its own species. It differs immeasurably from uprightness as a mere passive quality.

A stone pillar may be upright and by its uprightness may reveal the deviation from the perpendicular of other pillars in the vicinity. But that is the extent of its power. It can do nothing to correct their deviation from the vertical. But a righteous life works rectifyingly on other lives. It makes for uprightness. It is not merely a rebuke, but an inspiration. It is recorded of Goethe that when he saw the Venus de Milo for the first time and beheld its matchless grace, he burst into tears and cried "She has no arms!" But the matchless grace of the ideal righteousness has got arms, and they are outstretched in Jesus Christ to draw us near.

To gain the true inwardness of this verse, we must push behind this word "law" and endeavour to reach the essential idea it is employed to express. Otherwise we shall be hard pressed to account for such a strong term as "delight" being selected by the Psalmist to set forth his feeling in regard to what is commonly construed as a cold statute in the way of prohibition or command. Rightly interpreted "the law of the Lord" with-

out and in statute form, is a ringing challenge to a great adventure for the recovery of lost treasure and alienated possessions. Written within, it is the call of the blood, the ancestral imperative of the original and unspoiled human nature, the homing instinct of the soul which is older than the fall, and which, though cast down, has not been destroyed.

> "Not in entire forgetfulness
> And not in utter nakedness,
> But trailing clouds of glory do we come
> From God, who is our home."

We have reminiscences of a lost harmony as well as anticipations of its restoration. In the absence of this inward sense of discord and incompleteness, the summons of the ideal righteousness, as expressed in the moral law would have no significance or power of appeal. But to the normal man it always possesses this power. This fact constituted the ground of Paul's confidence in presenting the claims of the Gospel message. He knew always that in preaching the truth, he had an ally in the hearer's own breast. "By manifestation of the truth we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." It is in

the harmonisation of life with these antiphonal voices—the statutory imperative from without and the "categorical imperative" from within—that the heart of man realises the rapture of restored relations, leaping with delight as it listens and learns and lines up with, the "Law of the Lord."

But the Law of the Lord is not merely a command, it is a dynamic. In common usage the words "law" and "force" are frequently employed as though they were interchangeable terms. It is indeed very difficult to think of them apart and yet we have to remember that a law, as a law, can do nothing. What we call the laws of nature are simply registrations of the observed uniformity with which certain occurrences always follow certain antecedent conditions. Of course, no great harm follows this interchangeable use of "law" and "force" in our discussions, as long as we do not fall into the error of supposing that because, forsooth, we have discovered the law or method by which God works out His sovereign purposes in nature, we have thereby dismissed the necessity for postulating the presence and working of the personal will, of which such laws are simply the expression and effect. The persistence, however,

with which we keep on commuting these two terms, suggests that their association is a necessity of thought. Indeed, in his "Reign of Law" Argyle affirms:—"An observed order of facts to be entitled to the rank of a law, must be an order so constant and uniform as to indicate necessity, and necessity can only arise out of the action of some compelling force. Law, therefore, comes to indicate not merely an observed order of facts, but that order as involving the action of some force or forces of which nothing more may be known than these visible effects. So that Force is the root idea of Law, in its scientific sense."

Now if "force" can be seen and felt to be the "root idea" of law in its moral and spiritual sense as well, an immense gain in comfort and assurance will be secured.

Here for example, is the law "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind and with all thy strength." Now if by putting ourselves in line with this formula we discover that instead of being a dead counsel of perfection, standing aloof and inoperative over against our lives, it is in itself a real "live wire," an electrified rail, so to speak, in consenting and co-operating with which

our wills pick up the current and become charged with its mighty dynamic, so that the path of righteousness becomes in truth a "new and *living* way," we begin to understand the Psalmist's rapture in this enabling and liberating law. His delight then, springs not from the contemplation from without of a cold set of statutory regulations and requirements, but from the consciousness of being caught up and swept along by a stream of spiritual force running on concurrently with the regulation, and of which the regulation becomes the conductor, because it is the living and empowering will of God. There is a bound Prometheus in every man—a captive angel struggling to be freed. It is only in the encompassing atmosphere of the universal Love which is law, and the universal law which is Love, that it can find liberation and space for the stroke of its mighty wing. When the soul of man thus finds the law of its being, it is at once at peace. It slips into its old-time place as a dislocated joint slides back into its socket and knows and feels itself at home. Now, it can work in comfort, and with the free and frictionless movement which perfectly adjusted relations permit. Now, it can answer every call that is made upon it from without or urged from within. It

is set free from the tyranny of acquired habit and inherited bias, by the liberating law of love, whose every impulse it leaps to obey.

When a man thus learns that the limitations of law are the impositions of love—that love has lined them out, not for the sake of hemming his way in with repression but of clearing his track for expression, it lights up the whole system with a new and wondrous meaning. He receives the freedom of the City of God. He is no longer ruled by restriction from without, but by inspiration from within. He has entered into and become one with that spirit which is behind and through all law; that Presence

> "Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of man
> A motive and a spirit that impels
> All thinking things, all objects of all thought
> And rolls through all things."

Even the laws of the state, when rightly interpreted, will be seen, not as vexing limitations, arbitrarily imposed for the purpose of curtailing one's freedom, but as beneficent provisions for its enlargement and security. Workmen in mills

and mines, on trams and trains, are often found, through want of thought or lack of intelligence, resenting the rules and regulations that are posted up for the purpose of safeguarding life and limb. If they only reflected for a moment, they would see that all these warnings, precautions and restrictions represent the last word in the way of matured experience, clever device and solicitous desire for the promotion of human safety and the preservation of human life.

That is to say, the vital principle which prompts the framing and animates the administration of such laws is love, and once men can be got to grasp this truth, it must change their entire attitude and make them keep in step. Law thus construed, instead of limiting, greatly enlarges the freedom of one's action. He who imagines that he would have more liberty if all laws were abrogated has not learned how to think. Let him act out his theory by shifting his home and business to a country where there are no laws and every man does what is right in his own eyes and he will mighty soon wish he were back again under the Stars and Stripes or the Union Jack, with all the ordered liberties they secure, and in spite of the vexing restrictions which, for the

greatest good of the greatest number, they impose.

True blessedness, according to the Psalmist, lies in putting one's self and keeping one's self in the midmost stream of the Divine purpose. That purpose finds expression in His law and that law, as we have seen, is a living force that makes for righteousness. Every divine command thus becomes a divine pledge. The words "Thou shalt" are not merely an ordinance, they are a prophecy; for whom God commands, He enables, whom He commissions, He provisions, and the power to obey will always be found streaming alongside the will to obey.

Very much of men's resentment against the limitations of law would disappear if they would but remind themselves that there is quite another side to the question than that of mere restriction. It would not be fair, for example, in thinking of the law of gravitation, to fix the mind only on the things it forbids and exclude the things it allows. To see merely the structures it condemns and casts down, and have no eye for those it approves and upholds, would betray a mentality with no sense of proportion. The constructive and consolidating work of gravitation, whereby it maintains in reciprocal and harmonious rela-

tion all the multitudinous members of the cosmic system, infinitely transcends anything in the way of mere destructive and disintegrating work in which it may be employed. When one thinks of the fact that every day this law not only preserves the unity and reciprocity of the solar system, but is sweeping it along—sun, moon and planets with all their attendant satellites—at a daily rate of a million miles in a straight line, so that instead of spinning round like a top in one place, the entire system is as many miles from where it was when the earth became habitable as there are minutes in two hundred thousand million years—it comes as a great and wholesome corrective to the pin-point view.

Now what the law of gravitation is to the physical world, may be taken to illustrate what the moral law is to the world of accountable being. It holds the system together, it gives it coherence and balance, it inspires and directs its activities. To think, then, of this law merely as exercising brake-power, restricting and restraining the free use of faculty, is a quite one-sided view. It must be conceived of as the driving force of the moral world as well as its power of control. In brief, it is the one great ultimate force of Divine Love,

seeking and finding multiplied modes of self-expression and self-impartation.

The highest expression of Law as Love is reached in the Incarnate Son of God. Jesus becomes the final and focal point where Love and Law both meet and mingle and find their unity. In Him the law found adequate articulation and came to its fullest expression. This is what He meant when He said "I am come not to destroy but to fulfil." The word "fulfil" here means to "fill full," to charge to the brim. Christ took the moral law up into His own personality, He embodied it, He gave it full, free, unhindered play throughout the whole world of His thought and feeling, His words and deeds. He became in Himself the law done into life.

> "And so the Word had breath and wrought
> With human hands, the creed of creeds,
> In loveliness of perfect deeds
> More strong than all poetic thought."

Paul tells us that the end of the law is love out of a pure heart. But that which emerges in the end as an actual thing, must have been involved in the beginning as a possible thing. So that Paul might just as truly have said "The

beginning of the law is love." It took its rise in the loving heart of God and when it flows down and is shed abroad in the loving, loyal and responsive heart of man to upleap to the level of its source, its circuit is complete.

Thus, then, wherever we pierce through to the true inwardness of law, we find that the essence of it is love. To discover this vital principle, to respond to it with all the heart and soul and mind and strength, is to be bathed in blessedness and to know what it means to "delight in the law of the Lord." To put law and love, then, in opposing camps, is totally to misconstrue them both. All God's laws were conceived in love, enacted in love and are administered by love. Love was their initial impulse and love is their final goal. Little wonder, then, that law thus interpreted should beget delight or that Paul should break out into rapture as he writes:

"There is, therefore now, no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the spirit. For the law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death."

V

In His Law Doth He Meditate Day and Night

In our last study we saw that the human will that puts itself in line with the law of the Lord finds itself caught in a stream of pure and purifying force which is steadily and continuously setting toward the ideal righteousness.

It is a force always at hand and available for driving-power, direction, and control. Just as magnetism will possess a needle that is surrendered to its sway, so that every molecule becomes polarised, so this great force of moral magnetism will polarise the human will that swings free to its mystic potency. It will invest the surrendered will with attractions toward the highest and with repulsions from the lowest, till the spirit of loyalty becomes organised in the very structure of body and brain. When life is thus harmonised with the spirit of the universe, it is little wonder that it should thrill with delight. But that the godly man does not dwell merely in the

realm of delightful emotions, is clear from the verse under study to-day. The joy of the blessed life becomes greatly enhanced, when in addition to the feelings being stirred, thought is broadened, deepened and enriched. The feelings of course have a very valuable and important part to play in the religious life. But they must be taken up into thought, and disciplined into service, or they will break bounds and bring the life to grief. They represent immense driving power, but power, to vindicate its possession must be yoked up to some serviceable piece of work. Moreover the power to go, must always be accompanied by the power to slow. Every driver of an engine—every owner of an automobile—knows what a sense of satisfaction and security springs from the feel that his machine is instantly responding to the various levers, leaping forward or slowing, turning, reversing, or coming to a stand, at a touch. Without this consciousness of control, a motor trip would become one of the most nerve-racking experiences through which one could pass. With it, a day on the road is a delight. Nor is the delight in any way modified but immeasurably heightened, when the driver not only knows his machine to be responsive to his touch, but knows why it responds,

and is able mentally to visualise what takes place every time a lever is pulled or a button pressed. Thus it all comes back to this, that the keenest joy of life, viewed as a going concern, springs from the consciousness of self-control—that is to say from one's loyal acceptance of duty and allegiance to law.

While then the delight of the blessed life fills the heart of the godly man, he likewise finds endless occupation for his brain in the contemplation of the moral law, which while commanding his reverential awe, is also forever challenging the highest effort of his thought. As he pushes behind and beneath the mere statutory direction, he comes face to face with that all-pervading Personality of whose will all laws are simply the expression and effect.

The secrets of the spiritual realm like those of the material universe reveal themselves only to those whose minds are keyed to truth. "Every one that is of the truth," said Christ, "heareth my voice." Nature may be regarded as saying the same. To come into her presence with a prejudiced mind, to try and force her facts into our own preconceived theories is effectually to shut her mouth. Like Christ before Pilate, she is dumb

before prejudice. The physical world is organised thought, else there could be no science of it. If there were no ordered intelligence behind the phenomena of nature how then could they be translated into terms of order? Kelvin's fine phrase that "Science is simply thinking God's thoughts after him" is only another way of saying this. We refuse to believe that there is anything haphazard or capricious in the happenings of nature, and though there may be many events the occurrence of which we have not yet been able to reduce to any ordered system, we cannot doubt that a fuller knowledge of the facts harvested from a wider field of observation, will put the key into our hands.

But that the mind of man can thus to any degree spell out the mind of God as it stands expressed in the laws and forces of the material order, implies a relation between the creative mind of God, and the interpreting mind of man. The very possibility of science rests upon this implication. That this mutual relation should be part of the divine purpose would seem to be a necessary requirement in any system of thought which seeks to interpret the universe and man's place in it, in terms of ethics. If God desires to be

known and trusted, to be loved and obeyed by his creatures, then clearly he must make that desire both intelligible and commendable to them, and how can his mind in this or in any other direction be made ascertainable or intelligible excepting to minds fashioned to some degree after his own. Between Governor and governed, Leader and led, Teacher and taught, Father and child, there must be some point of contact, some common ground, where they can meet and come to an understanding. Where no such contact can be set up, there can be no authority on the one hand nor obligation on the other.

Research in the field of nature has such a fascination for the scientific mind, and men become so absorbed in the use of microscope and telescope as to become insensible to hunger and thirst. In the pursuit of knowledge in chemical and electrical investigations they expose themselves to numberless risks. Men brave the rigours of the polar regions and dwell in fever-stricken jungles, amid the stifling heats of the tropics, that they may add to the sum of human knowledge, extend the area of human delight, or lengthen the span of human life. The pathway of scientific investigation and discovery is strewn with the bones of

countless pioneers and the martyrs of science are well-nigh as numerous as those of religion.

But if researches into physical nature are of such absorbing interest that men are prepared to perish in their quest and—

> Follow knowledge like a sinking star
> Beyond the utmost bound of human thought:

then what about the study of the moral universe? What about the fascination of inquiry into the method of God in working out His sovereign purposes in history, and carrying all things forward to the goals of His beneficent desire? Surely here is a field that challenges the highest gifts of heart and brain, a field in which the mind may range to all eternity. Here are laws and forces as high as the throne of God and deep as the heart of man. But the science of spiritual things is not only fascinating, it is intensely practical, and its acquisition heightens immeasurably all the values of life. It is this knowledge which according to the Psalmist is the distinguishing quest of the godly man. Here the human mind discovers its true correlate in the mind and heart of God. But God's mind and heart are revealed to us, as nowhere else in the pages of His Word. Hence

it is that meditation in the "law of the Lord" as there disclosed, becomes the godly man's delight.

Now the word "meditate" in the original, means to murmur a melody, or to say something over and over again as a loving refrain, upon which mind and heart delight to linger. Thus the suggestion sought to be conveyed seems to be, that by brooding and crooning over the law of God, and sympathetically thinking and feeling one's way into the innermost spirit of it, we become conscious of and responsive to its underlying music. Deep calleth unto deep, and in this antiphonal the soul becomes attuned according to the laws of a preordained affinity. We have already seen that the law without must have its counterpart within, to which it can make its appeal. It is through meditation that the soul's awareness is awakened to catch the "law within the law" to which it is related, as truly as are the organs of physical sight and hearing to the vibrations of light and sound. Harmony of color and design to the optic nerve, or of sound to the auditory nerve, is of such a nature, that it sets these nerves singing, so to speak, responsive to its music, till the whole being becomes tremulous with the gracious spirit of which the laws of light and sound are merely the expres-

sion. If meditation in the physical laws that mould the dewdrop, that distil the fragrance of the flower, that marshal the starry hosts, that paint the glories of the sunset, and gently open the gateways of the dawn, that weep in the falling rain, that smile in the rainbow and laugh in the waves that break in multitudinous music on a thousand shores—have such a power to stir the heart with rapture, or hush the spirit into trembling awe, then what untold delights, what undreamt of possibilities of wondering ecstasy, must await the experience of the soul that sinks into the depths of the moral law and comes "breast to breast with God." The cure for all our narrow-mindedness, our shallow-heartedness, our bitterness and bigotry, our lopsideness and contemptible littleness, lies just here—so close indeed that we do not see it. Listen to the great Apostle—"Say not in thine heart who shall ascend into heaven to bring Christ down or descend into the deep to bring Him up again from the dead. The Word is nigh thee even in thy mouth and in thy heart."

Speak to Him thou, for He hears thee
And spirit with spirit may meet;
Closer is He than breathing,
And nearer than hands and feet.

We have been too content to live on the mere surface of things. As swallows skim the bosom of a lake and dip their wings and fly away, all careless and unconscious of the depths beneath, so we flit to and fro across the surface of time all heedless of the great and solemn eternity that everywhere and always underspreads the most trivial round and common task. Our modern life is lived under such stress and strain of body and brain, that it is exceedingly difficult even when desired to win opportunity for quiet thoughts of God and things unseen. Our Western life is a life of hurry and worry of haste and waste. It is a rush and a race from morning till night. The East does not hurry. There is an Oriental proverb which says, "There is only one person that requires to be in a hurry and that is the Devil, for he has a great deal to do and only a limited time in which to do it." Unless we can be redeemed from the pace at which we move, or rather from the anxiety that begets the pace, we shall not live out half our days. We must, even in the interests of our business efficiency, to say nothing of our soul's health, find time for the quiet and reflective hour. We live in such a simmer of excitement that some of us cannot bear the brooding stillness of retreat.

Silence gets on our nerves. We have a morbid craving for stimulation. We hate to be alone and must have some one by with whom to talk. If that be impracticable, then some engrossing book, or thought-preventing picture-show. This is all in very sad contrast with the lives that were lived by our fathers and their sires. At all costs, they sought to keep at least some time inviolate, some vacant spaces in which the shining ones might come and go between them and the great unseen. Religion was their life. They saw that it must be everything or nothing and so, *everything*, they resolved it should be. All interests and affairs, family, social, business and State, were planned and executed with reference to it. No serious step was taken without prayer and earnest thought as to how it would bear on one's relations to God and affect one's influence for Good. The Divine will was consulted and even its intervention sought, rather than that a false step should be taken or a wrong decision made. This brought religion into everyday life and made it very real and prominent. It became the atmosphere in which they lived and moved, and unless it be allowed thus to control our common affairs, it is difficult to see of what practical value it can

be, or why we should hold it in regard. There may of course be risk lest a too easy familiarity with sacred things should result in lowering religion to the level of the market-place, instead of lifting the market-place to the level of it. But it does not compare with the risk of excluding God utterly from the domain of business and politics, as though His presence were an intrusion, and these were areas which religion must not be permitted to invade.

The effect of the latter policy is alas! only too painfully apparent in the lowering of our morals and the laxity of our laws. This treatment of religion as though it were an exotic—some delicate transplantation from a foreign clime, which can only be kept alive under hothouse conditions —is one of the Devil's most successful methods of countering the Kingdom of God. If our religion be of such a type that it cannot survive contact with the world then so far as this life is concerned it is a clear futility, and the sooner it is displaced and superseded by one that can, the sooner will we clear ourselves of the world's contempt. To talk of it as though it were too sacred a thing to be handled suggests at once the inevitable enquiry:—then why keep going a concern

which has not only no working value, but consumes time and money and energy to sustain? Christ spoke of its forces under the symbols of Salt and Light. But imagine purchasing salt under strict injunction that on no account must it be brought into contact with any other article, but be sealed and kept apart. Why, the very distinctive quality it possesses, suggests, prophesies, calls out for contact, and fulfils itself only as it finds it. Or again, imagine if you can the Electric Supply Company placing an embargo on all its customers to the extent that while light-energy will be delivered yet it will only be on the strict condition that it is not to be used at night! You say that is too ridiculous. Excuse me, it is not a bit more ridiculous than our imagining that the savour and illumination of religion have been bestowed to be preserved and conserved, lest by contact with the world of moral corruption and darkness they should be lost. The fact is that the only way to save your religion is to spend it. He that seeks to save it by keeping it, will lose it and be counted guilty of default.

But there is another reason why we have elbowed religion out of common life and restricted it to Sabbath use, and that is, that our common

life would simply be impossible in many of its practices, if our religion were permitted to dictate and control. Hence to avoid unpleasantness we keep them apart. Such a sense of the Divine presence as we are contending for, might prove exceedingly embarrassing in many of our transactions and render others impossible of attempt.

But do not let us fall under the error of supposing that because God is invisible to us we are unseen by Him. Whether we will or not, we are dwellers in His domain, and there is positively no square inch of the universe from which He is withdrawn. The Western races are worn and wasted. They find themselves spent and exhausted by the pace at which they are compelled to move, and instead of seeking the cure in those healing silences, where face to face with the Eternal they can gather force and freshness for the daily fight, they either plunge into some wild whirl of excitement that makes them forget for a time the drudgery of their colorless existence, or else they dope themselves with one or other of the always available drugs, and effect a temporary escape from depression, at the cost of its subsequent and sevenfold return. The fact is that this life was never planned to be run apart from God,

and it cannot be done without friction and fret. The whole of our trouble is due either to adopting substitutes for God, or leaving Him wholly out of count. The cure for most, if not all of our maladies, physical, mental and moral, lies in the prescription of our text.

The God consciousness of the old Hebrew Psalmists was as keen if not keener than their sense of the things they felt and saw. They pierced the veils of the visible, and endured as seeing Him Who is invisible. In what a world of hallowed thought and feeling must the man have dwelt who wrote the 139th Psalm:—

O Lord, Thou hast searched me, and known me.

Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising. Thou understandest my thought afar off.

Thou compassest my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways.

For there is not a word in my tongue, but lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether.

Thou hast beset me behind and before, and laid Thine hand upon me.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high; I cannot attain unto it.

Whither shall I go from Thy Spirit? or whither shall I flee from Thy presence?

If I ascend up into Heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in the underworld, behold, Thou art there.

If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea;

Even there shall Thy hand lead me, and Thy right hand shall hold me.

If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me.

Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day; the darkness and the light are both alike to Thee.

And let it be noted this is no mournful plaint of a hunted soul, seeking escape from the All-seeing eyes. On the contrary, this sense of Jehovah's presence folding him round, going before, following after and laying upon him gentle but Almighty hands, is the triumphant note of the song. The Psalmist is exulting in the everywhereness of God—that, go where he will, he is still within the encircling arms. That wherever he may walk his ways, or wing his flight, there step for step will walk with him, or beat for beat, will wing with him the Unseen Presence, upholding his goings and guarding his way, through storm and shine, through peace and war, by land and sea, by dark and day. Now such a sense of the Divine nearness in which the Psalmist rejoiced we may be tempted to think of as possible under old-world conditions and in the slow-going and

monotonous Orient, but out of the question for the rapidly-moving and ever-changing West in which we dwell. But let us not forget that all the same, whether we be conscious of it or not, He besets us behind and before, and lays upon us His gentle but Almighty hand. He is always at call. Always at hand to reinforce our drooping purposes and strengthen us in all that is pure and wise and good. Let us cultivate the sense of His presence, till such a God-consciousness possesses the soul as shall lift us up above all the petty annoyances, irritations and bewilderments of time and bathe our spirits in the healing silence of God's cool and calm eternity.

> Yea, in the night, my Soul, my daughter,
> Cry,—clinging Heaven by the hems;
> And lo, Christ! walking on the water—
> Not of Gennesareth, but Thames!

VI

A Tree Planted by Rivers of Water

Now we have seen how delight in the law requires to be succeeded by meditation in the law if the realm of the emotions is to be brought into subjection to the realm of thought. This it must be if the helm of life is to be held in the grip of a resolute purpose, and not swing this way and that to every wind and wave of feeling. The feelings must be taken up into the mind and disciplined by the reason into order and control. They represent great executive force, but force that is unregulated is not only useless, it may work untold harm. It must therefore be placed under the rule of reason, instructed by conscience, and thus controlled by mental and moral considerations. But this control must always be exercised so as not to impair initiative, discourage spontaneity, or destroy the power of self-expression, because life has been bestowed in order to be expressed and displayed.

This then seems to be the order of the Psalmist's thought. Delight in the law passes through meditation, into a well-reasoned apprehension and appreciation of the law, to emerge and express itself through this mental process in terms of character and conduct, for it is character and conduct that we are to understand as being symbolised by the tree and its fruit.

We have seen that the blessed man reaches his bliss through piercing through the dry surface of the written code and letter of the law to the free, fresh and ever-flowing spirit, which is its vital and vitalising principle. We used the expression *stream of force* when speaking of the law and found that immediately a man placed himself in line with the divine requirement in full and glad surrender, he found that he was tapping a veritable underground river of spiritual energy, which straightway leapt to his service, to flow through all his being and carry its life-giving dynamic to every faculty of body and brain. Now no finer illustration could possibly have been employed by the Psalmist in order to set forth this result than that of a tree planted by a river-side. It strikes its roots down into a soil saturated with life-giving potency, and is

thus able to lift itself up in fresh and vigorous defiance of the Sirocco's fiery breath and the sunbeams' flaming swords.

The idea sought to be conveyed then, is that the blessed life is not merely a set of emotions which expend themselves in thrills of inward delight—nor even a set of mental conclusions which the reason has fashioned into a system of thought, but it is all this fine thought and gracious feeling, breaking into fair and fragrant bloom. Because the roots of the blessed life are struck deep into the soil of the invisible it comes to leaf and blossom and fruit in the visible. What water is to the life of a tree the spirit of the law is to the life of the soul. As a man drinks in that spirit, it fills and floods and fertilises his whole being. He thenceforth embodies the law in himself. It is no more merely outward, but inward; incorporated in living flesh and blood. He furnishes it with a fitting field in which to display its innermost meaning and manifold powers. He supplies it with a body and brain that it may incarnate itself—and so the Law has breath, and becomes a living soul.

A perfectly healthy tree-life is the visible product of invisible physical forces which translate

themselves into terms of natural beauty and utility, in fragrance and fruit. In like manner a perfectly healthy and harmonious human life is the visible product of invisible spiritual forces, which by mystic processes translate themselves into terms of moral beauty and efficiency.

We have already seen in previous studies that the active principle of the law is *love*. But love must find expression. It must expend itself on the object of its regard. It finds its highest and most rapturous expression in sacrifice. Show it the line of greatest resistance in self-sacrificing service, and that is the line it will above all others select, and along which it will pour its richest treasure.

Now what flower and fruit are to a tree, that sacrifice is to human life. In the Saviour's parable of the vine the bloom and fruitage represents the supreme effort of life, even at the cost of sacrifice, to pass on the torch of being. The fruit of a tree is its recognition of the principle that it may not live to itself. It must not become a vital terminus but a mere wayside station, in which life temporarily abides that it may set up a centre of distribution and then move on. This was the law under which all life was placed

in the beginning of days—"Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth." It is in the fruit of a tree that the principle of reproduction lies cradled and concealed. The whole future organism is there potentially gathered up in miniature. It is the beautiful and fragrant expression of life's loyalty to the law of succession under the pressure of which the vital principle demands of the organism in which it for the time resides, a right-of-way along which it may pour its reproductive powers.

Thus then as at the spring-time we pierce beneath all this seeming gaiety and wantonness, this riot and revel of feast and fragrance, of colour and contour, in leaf, and flower and fruit, we see how deeply serious is the business for which it stands. It is life's supreme effort to fulfil its stewardship. It is an acknowledgment that the vital principle is not a mere possession to be selfishly enjoyed or fooled and frittered away at will—but a deposit to be held in trust for posterity and bequeathed unencumbered and unspoiled. Now it is with these deep-lying thoughts, these mystical and sacramental meanings that we are concerned. Here are the two great obligations which the symbol of the fruitful tree exemplifies

and proclaims: First, to hand down unimpaired to our successors that which we have so richly received. Secondly, to suffer and make sacrifice if need be in the fulfilment of our trust. All that we are enjoying to-day has come to us through the struggle of others. It is the fruit of sacrifice, the purchase of blood. We can vindicate our right to enjoy such sacrificial fruit only as we are prepared in turn to be sacrificial too. We may not be called upon to die for our country, but we are called to live for it. This will often call for a greater heroism than that which is required to lead a forlorn hope—to scale forbidding heights and to earn the badge of bravery. It is the homely heroism of common life. There are strange forces at work in the social life of our time, forces highly organised and gathering in intelligence and power. But unless these newly awakened potencies, in the persons of those who wield them, are brought to the Cross of Calvary, and are there baptised into the spirit of Christ's self-sacrificing love, they will work disaster and doom. Deeds are seeds and we have but to ask what as a people we are doing and the problem of our destiny is instantly solved.

What does the Psalmist desire to convey by the

assurance "His leaf also shall not wither"? I have worked this out from a biological point of view in my chapter on "Metabolism" in the Fernley Lecture for 1923,* in some such way as follows:

When the Psalmist likened the godly man to a tree, whose leaf should not wither, he was probably building better than he knew. But be this as it may, in fixing attention on the greenness of the leaf, he seized on the one and only gateway through which life in all its myriad forms can be sustained. One wonders as to how much he did know of the functions fulfilled by the leaf. Having shown that the roots of the tree are struck deep into the well-soaked river-bank, it really seems, at first sight unnecessary to affirm anything in regard to the perennial greenness of the leaf. That surely might have been taken for granted under such favourable conditions as are named. Moreover, after stating that the tree brings forth its fruit in its season, does it not seem superfluous and rather in the nature of an anti-climax to refer to the leaf at all? So indeed, on a surface view, it might appear, but aided by investigators in this field we come to a better knowl-

* "'The Church which is His Body', Studied in the Light of Biological Research," p. 45.

edge as to the functions fulfilled by the leaf in the life-history of the tree. Biological research has revealed that upon the leaf as on a pivot the whole fortune of the tree structure has been made to turn. Whether the Psalmist made this reference wittingly or otherwise, the fact remains that when he did so he was giving the leaf the due place, to which, according to the most advanced scientific knowledge, it should be assigned. As a matter of plain fact, there is only the thickness of a green leaf between the whole world of physical life and the silent realm of death. This is not poetry, but simple, downright prose. Scientific investigation reveals that the greenness of a leaf is due to the presence of what is known as chlorophyll—a substance that appears to be the product of a union between sunlight and the protoplasmic fluid which the leaf contains. Under the action of the sun's rays little granules of this chlorophyll bunch themselves together into masses called chloroplasts, each of which, on examination, is seen to be a manufacturing centre of the nutriment upon which the life of the tree or plant depends. This is the tiny hinge on which the door of life for man and beast has been made to swing. According to Professor Huxley, the

vegetable Kingdom is the only one that really works. As for the Animal Kingdom, all its members from man downwards to the amœba, are only consumers of manufactured products, non-producers, mere hangers-on! The green leaf is the whirling seat and centre of ceaseless activity.

In considering the life of a tree we have been accustomed to stress the importance of the root. This, however, in the light of what we have seen, is a case of misplaced emphasis, and it is the leaf upon which the accent must fall. It is true that the root is responsible for supplying the water-power without which the machinery of assimilation, development, and reproduction could not be run. Upon the root also devolves the duty of extracting and passing on certain salts from the soil which go to the structure of the tree. These are, however, so amazingly small in proportion to the tree's bulk as practically to be a negligible quantity.

Timiriazeff, Professor of Botany in the University of Moscow, conducted a most interesting experiment in reference to this fact. He planted a willow wand weighing five pounds in a pot containing exactly two hundred pounds weight of soil. He watched and watered this wand for

five years, after which he carefully lifted it out, removing every grain of adhering soil, to discover that it now weighed one hundred and sixty-nine pounds three ounces. But so little had it drawn from the soil itself, that when the latter was weighed it was found to be but two ounces less than the original two hundred pounds. Instead, then, of the root, it is the leaf that represents the point where the real business of the tree is carried on, and the most vital relations are set up and sustained. When a seed is cast off by the parent tree it is started out clad in a suitable case, under cover of which are packed up all its requirements, including a measure of manufactured and concentrated nutriment for setting up housekeeping on its own account. Should it find suitable soil it straightway responds and lets loose its latent energies. Once the wondrous machinery of life is thus set going it is run for a time on inherited fuel—the portion of goods falling to it, so to speak, upon leaving home, and which is enough to start it in life for itself with a fair chance of success. By the time the root has struck down and the shoot thrust up, the plant's capital, in the way of inherited stores, is used up, so that it now requires to take its hands out of its pockets and

work for its daily bread. These hands are its leaves, and the independent life of the plant begins from the moment that the first ray of light falls upon its unfolding leaf. Until the ray of sunlight thus falls upon the leaf's surface its activity cannot begin. This activity is directed to extracting and assimilating the carbon that is stored up in the atmosphere. In the atmosphere it is in combination with oxygen, but the chlorophyll in the leaf breaks down this combination, absorbs the carbon and releases the oxygen. Upon the leaf is thrown the entire responsibility of keeping up the food supply for the tree's support. It becomes the centre of exchange, the transforming station where inorganic matter is changed into organic and thus the life of the tree maintained. The green leaf, according to biology, is the one and only medium whereby solar energy becomes translated into vital force, and is made available for use by man and beast, for without the green leaf there is absolutely nothing that could live.

It is a significant fact that in the Genesis story of Creation the emphasis is placed on the green herb as the pivot on which life in man and beast was made to turn. Genesis 1 : 29, "And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb [Hebrew

"eseb"—the same word translated "green herb" in Genesis 1:30 and 9:3] bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for meat. And to every beast of the earth, and to every fowl of the air, and to every thing that creepeth upon the earth, wherein there is life, I have given every green herb [Heb. "eseb"] for meat: and it was so." Again in the story of the Flood the dove that Noah sent forth from the Ark is represented as coming home from its second flight with a freshly plucked olive leaf in her mouth, the pledge and prophecy of the multitudinous life of man and beast with which God was about to renew the face of the earth. Thus the earliest word of Scripture and the latest word of biological science agree in stressing the green leaf as the one absolutely essential thing upon which the maintenance of life depends.

Now that which in the spiritual life, whether individual or communal, corresponds to the function of the leaf in the way of appropriating and assimilating the forces of another and higher world, is, according to the whole teaching of both scripture and experience, the function of faith.

Unless by a living faith we are in account current with the spiritual forces that are banked to our credit, we must blanch into anæmia and fall into spiritual decline. Or to retain the metaphor of the Psalmist, instead of being like a tree planted by the rivers of water, we shall be merely a drift of dried and driven leaves. Nor is it merely that the spiritual life in such a case becomes dwarfed and diminished. There results an all-round depreciation of values. Every department of life, physical, intellectual, and moral, depends for its reinforcement on the soul. We do not dream how deeply central is the religious factor, nor how powerful it is in determining our social, political, and industrial values. We can do our best work in this world only as we draw on that world for our supplies. What the sun is to the leaf, that and infinitely more is God to the soul. Only in correspondence with Him who is the Life of life, the Light of light and the Fountain of all the forces that sweep in and around us, can we discover either our greatest bliss or our highest efficiency. To shut ourselves up in this material world, with no outlook or outreach toward another, is to stultify our being and defraud it of

its flower and crown. Never was the need so great as at the present to hold fast to moral values.

In these days of revision and reconstruction when the most cherished convictions are being called upon to verify themselves, we are being driven back from the outworks of mere form and ceremony to the naked and elemental truths for which our symbols and watchwords stand. Woe be to us if when we do fall back we have no solid ground on which to place our feet. It is a time of searching inwardness as to whether we are holding on to our faith as a merely cherished but perished form through which the spirit breathes no more, or as a great vital and vitalising reality. If the latter, then we need fear no legitimate test. Only the things that are temporary and incidental can be shaken, that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. The trouble with too many of us is that when the outward framework of things crumbles, there is nothing behind it. Instead of such outwardness revealing life it is concealing decay. The leaf as we have seen depends for its fresh and vivid green upon another world than this. Let it be cut off from that world then straightway it will blanch into a pale and sickly hue. Through want of light its bio-

chemistry will cease to function, with the result that not only will its own being be aborted, but that of the entire tree, whose fortunes, as we have seen, pivot on the behaviour of the leaf. Now through a thousand untoward happenings a leaf may seek and not find the wherewithal for its nutrition, and thus wither and fall. Thus when it is affirmed of the godly man that his leaf shall not wither, we may take it to mean that nothing shall ever be allowed to come in between him and the base of his supplies. His other-world connection will be continuously maintained. Though rooted in this world, yet like the tree he will stretch forth appealing and appropriating hands toward another upon which he will draw for his dynamic to be and to do and to endure.

"I think that I shall never see
A poem lovely as a tree;

"A tree whose hungry mouth is prest
Against the earth's sweet flowering breast;

"A tree that looks at God all day
And lifts her leafy arms to pray;

"A tree that may in summer wear
A nest of robins in her hair;

"Upon whose bosom snow has lain;
Who intimately lives with rain.

"Poems are made by fools like me,
But only God can make a tree."

JOYCE KILMER.

VII

Whatsoever He Doeth Shall Prosper

This is a promise, which at first sight seems to be hopelessly at quarrel with the facts of life. There is not one of us who could not from his own observation, refute the proposition that Piety and Prosperity are interchangeable terms. All history gives it the lie. If the author of this Psalm had committed himself to such a view our first feeling would have been one of surprise at any writer, with any pretence to accuracy of observation, having the temerity to endorse a theory which the experience of the centuries so abundantly disproves, and in refutation of which he himself could have cited hundreds of cases in which he had seen the righteous overborne by disaster and the wicked established in "great power and flourishing like a green bay tree." But as we look more closely at our text we see that it makes no such claim, as a mere casual reading would suggest. It is not the prosperity of the righteous man himself that is here predicted, but rather the perma-

nence and reproductiveness of his work. From a merely material point of view he may fail, indeed he often does. His whole career may be pursued under the most adverse conditions, at one time scorched with the fires of a quenchless hate, at another numbed by the icy breath of a freezing apathy. He may be misunderstood, maligned and even martyred, but though men may kill *him* they cannot kill his *work*. The fruit that he is described as bringing forth in his season has seed in itself after its kind, and will go on reproducing itself, while he sleeps on. Nothing can do it hurt. No weapon formed against it can prosper. It mingles with the forces of the universe. It is secure from assault. No influence can weaken it; no power can arrest or destroy. Through storm and shine, through peace and war, by dark and day, it will hold on its victorious course. Not only is this so, but he knows it to be so. There is a deep and divine assurance begotten in his mind that whatever may happen to him is absolutely of no concern so long as what he has built survives.

Of this survival he has never a doubt. This inwrought confidence is the far out-weighing compensation which the good man possesses and en-

joys, amid all the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune. He need never doubt as to the ultimate triumph of the cause which he has espoused, and it is the cause, not himself, that matters. It is with its fortune, not his own, that he is concerned.

This deep-seated conviction that righteousness is the winning force in history gives such a man the courage to attempt, the calmness to wait, and the patience to endure. All he asks is elbow-room in which to work and sow the good seed of the Kingdom. He may never see the harvest, but what of that! He has harvested the sheaves of other men's sowing, whom he never saw, and so let other men reap the fields that he has scattered with the golden grain.

Our text then is an encouragement to pursue the ideal in spite of the dispiriting actual by which we may be confronted and in the very face of the discouragements, which the want of any public backing may induce. It is this faculty of "sticking it," and hopefully holding on in the teeth of thwarted purpose and baffled plan that always marks your top-quality man. The pioneers in all the great paths of life have been men of this type, men who found their pay in their achievement.

"Glory of virtue to fight, to struggle, to right the wrong.
Nay, but she aimed not at glory, no lover of glory she!
Give her the glory of going on and still to be.
She desires no isles of the blest, no quiet seats of the just
To rest in a golden grove or to bask in a summer sky.
Give her the wages of going on and not to die."

This is the spirit that has cut the path of progress for the world's feet, though its own have been pierced by many a thorn and bruised by many a stone. Such souls have been content to know that though their eyes may never see the promised land, yet they have brought it nearer and made it easier of attainment for those who follow on. The pathway of human progress gleams with the bones of those who have perished in the process of blazing a track.

Other men laboured and we have entered into their labours. They perished but their work survives. Whether in science, art, medicine, law, invention, political freedom, social justice, religion, the hands that fought for us and wrought for us and built the stairway up which we have climbed, have perished, but their work abides. By some strange irony it is only as they recede into the deep perspective of history that their names come to be duly honoured, and the value

of their contribution duly appraised. James Walter, in giving what he calls "Shakespeare's True Life," shows how blind were his contemporaries to his unparalleled services. Indeed, this has to be placed to the credit of Germany, that she was the first to ascribe to Shakespeare his proper place on the pinnacle of literary fame. Germany has this against us forever, that she had to discover for us, and to us, the greatest Englishman that has ever lived—so true is it that the prophet is without honour in his own country. Shakespeare has passed and perished, but his work lives on, gathering in splendour with the passing of the years. What matters it that his contemporaries under-estimated him! Time, the great master of the rolls, and custodian of the judgments of history, forever guards his name and his fame.

What was true of Shakespeare in poetry was true of Sebastian Bach in music. Though one of the greatest of geniuses in musical composition, he has had to wait some one hundred and fifty years to come to his kingdom and receive his crown. But because he believed in his work and wrought it regardless of fame, it will go on sing-

ing itself through the ages till it blends with the deep full music of the skies.

And these are only types of thousands whose work received no recognition while they lived. Not only so, but in countless instances the negative indifference passed out of its passive stage into one of positive hostility, and because they bravely held their ground, refusing to renounce their ideals, to sacrifice their principles and to sell the truth to serve the hour, they paid the penalty on the scaffold or at the stake, preferring to die rather than betray the cause which they had made their own. And they did it because in their heart of hearts they were assured that some day, and somehow, and somewhere, they would be vindicated before all worlds. It is this faculty of drawing on the future to reinforce the present that has marked all the higher spirits of the world. Their faith in their mission has been the faith of the seer,

> Who can so forecast the years
> To find in loss a gain to match:
> To reach a hand through time and catch
> The far-off interest of tears.

This is the faith that has made the men who have shaped the destinies of the race. It created

the heroes of the old world who, through it, "subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens." It was this faith that made the new world, for it fired the heart of Christ Himself with the daring of an unquenchable hope. Listen to the writer to the Hebrews again as, after conducting us through the gallery of the world's mighty men who gave the name and the character to the age in which they lived, he leads us up to the greatest of them all—"the Holiest among the mighty and the mightiest among the Holy"—"Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a crowd of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

This is the spirit. It was this that made Luther the hero of the Reformation, and enabled Calvin

to stand unawed before the anathemas of Rome. It was this that made Savonarola hurl his charge of impurity against the Priesthood of his day, and it was this that fired John Knox, John Wesley and William Booth. And this is still the faith that must sustain you and me and all men. We may be little and unknown; there may seem to be nothing very sublime in the round of our daily toil—we may not be recognised or praised; nay we may be persecuted, maligned, misunderstood, but never mind, let us stick it!

Go to your work and be brave,
  Halting not in your ways.
Baulking the end half won
  For an instant's dole of praise.

Stand to your work and be strong,
  Certain of sword and of pen.
Who are neither children nor gods
  But men in a world of men!

VIII

But the Ungodly Are Not So But Are Like the Chaff Which the Wind Driveth Away

When the Psalmist declares that "the ungodly are not so" this *not so* must be regarded as reaching back and controlling by contrast every statement he makes with regard to the godly man. The godly man is for example pronounced "blessed" with all that word connotes for fulfilled expectation and realised desire.

But the ungodly are not blessed. They have never found the true secret of perfect peace and perfect poise. They are not as the firmly grounded growth by the ever-running stream and whose far-flung and richly fruited branches sway to the wind and wake into music under its mystic touch. And here, let it be noted, that the same on-rushing breeze that drives the vacant chaff in helter-skelter flight, sweeps down with equal force upon the full-freighted tree. But while the latter matching might with might, wrestles with the

power of the air and wins therefrom a tougher fibre, an augmented strength, the former is at the mercy of every wind that blows. No finer contrast can be conceived than that of the living tree on the one hand, rich in fruit and foliage, standing in its fixed yet free and flexible strength challenging drought and tempest to do their worst, and the dead, dry, wind-driven chaff on the other hand which needs must dance to the piping of any and every wanton wind that blows.

Nothing can be conceived more hopelessly helpless than the condition thus described, and this is the Psalmist's delineation of the godless man. He is tossed to and fro by every up-rush of passion from within or by every in-rush of circumstance from without. He has no *pou sto* as the Greeks used to say, no foothold upon which he can depend for defence or attack. He loosens his neck from the service of God, which is the truest liberty, only to bend it to a serfdom which binds him hand and foot and then thrusts out his eyes, till all the freedom that he knows is the freedom of a blind Samson, making sport for the philistines of appetite, till faith and hope and love are literally burnt out of life, and the very faculty for God becomes disabled. This is the irony of the

situation that though a man may repudiate God as the Lord of his life he does not release himself from the necessity of service. He still has some god who claims his worship and to whom he renders homage—wealth, power, pleasure, fame, or self-indulgence in one or other of its seductive forms, lays its spell upon him; and these are gods that exact their dues and take heavy toll, with a rigour that leaves no opening for clemency, no room for discussion, no avenue for escape. That the victim is unconscious of his slavery and of the destination toward which he speeds constitutes one of the most appalling features of his fate. He is temporarily thrown into a condition of moral anæsthesia, under the deadening influence of which, he is deluded into the belief that this go-as-you-please and do-as-you-choose policy is the true philosophy of life. I say temporarily, for conscience sooner or later must awaken from its sleep and resume command. It will rise in offended majesty, smiting the soul with tormenting memories, and taking its revenges for neglect and abuse. What an abject slavery such so-called freedom conceals—what corrosive chains it hides only those who have passed under its bondage can fully declare.

But although the experience of the ages has been condensed into precept, proverb, and psalm, in order to illustrate and enforce this truth, the fatal delusion still persists and prevails that law and freedom stand opposed, and that for life to be placed under restriction is to have its liberty curtailed. This misconception springs, in part at least, from the failure to recognise or remember that the moral law is not something introduced subsequent to man's appearance and imposed upon him from without, but that on the contrary it was built into his very structure. It was the regulative, architectonic principle of his construction—a principle, in frank and free concurrence with which, his life can alone find its complete and full-orbed expression, its perfect totality, its unity, its harmonisation, its God-like symmetry and strength.

Thus within the bounds of law alone, can man really find the line of least resistance. This may seem to be contradictory, but once the experiment is made the seeming paradox vanishes and the principle is found to work. He finds a path prepared for his feet. He is on the King's Highway and discovers that his whole being was made to vibrate to the rhythm of His laws. As a matter

of fact these laws are never seen in their full working strength and uttermost grace until they stand organised in godly character which they have moulded into shape and touched into beauty. Till they have been voluntarily taken up by human intelligence, acquiesced in by human consent, and embodied in human conduct, they fall short of their divinely appointed destination, they do not discover their adequate field, they are defrauded of the material through which alone they can come to their most consummate flower and crown. All God's laws run down and root themselves in love, and they fulfil themselves only as they run their course and complete the circle by coming to fruit in love again. For what is love but the fulfilling of law, and what is law, but the lines that love has laid down, for reaching its own beneficent ends?

With this great law of love the ungodly man is out of step. He is not marching to its music, and he is so constituted that he cannot be at discord and be content. A man may have the whole world against him, yet if he be at peace with himself he can bid the world go swing—what cares he for it, its love or hate, esteem or scorn! He will be through with it presently, and

even if he weren't it would soon be through with him. It is just as ready to drop a man as to take him up—and with equal casualness or caprice. Even without leaving it, a man may be quit of this world, and as dead to its praise or blame as those who are locked in churchyard sleep are dead to the tide of business that ebbs and flows along our streets. But there is one thing that a man can never be quit of, that is himself; and woe to him if it be an accusing self. He has to eat and drink, walk and sit, work and rest, wake and sleep in its eternal company. From a thousand outside voices a man may find refuge in death, but from the accusing voice of conscience death can not only afford him no prospect of release, but will give to that voice a clearer accent, a more insistent and intensive note. He will need no judgment day, no judgment book, no outward and visible Judgment Seat, no pomp and circumstance of a great assize to know his place; neither will he need any material fire to torment him with its flame. "For each guilty word and deed holds in itself the seed of retribution and undying pain." The ungodly man will be self-arraigned, self-condemned, self-sentenced, self-separated, self-scourged. There need be nothing worse than

this and, if you can receive it, this will be hell. From this hell Christ came to save us. For this He lived and laboured and suffered; for this on the Green Hill without the City Wall, He died; for this He rose; for this He lives and reigns—and for this His Blessed Spirit folds us round and lays upon us His gentle and constraining Hands.

The antithesis to the sturdy growth, of a full-fruited tree as presented in the storm-driven chaff, is both striking and strong. Over against the quiet strength and durableness of the life that is being lived in and for God, is placed the feverish haste, the whirling insecurity, of the life that is lived for self. Let us not forget who the ungodly are, that are here represented. They are those from whose life God has been deliberately cut out. It is a settled policy of aloofness on their part by which they would exclude God from their reckoning and ignore Him as of no account. This attempt to live a self-contained life, shut up within the limits of earth and time is not without its difficulties. In order to prove successful, man would have first of all to do violence to certain organic instincts which are inseparable from his make-up—to effect indeed his own moral disinheritance, to divest himself of his innate divinity.

Man has never yet been left to the mercy of a merely external revelation. This had been to expose him to too great a risk. Thus the idea of a "somewhat" or a "someone" greater than himself has been divinely woven into the very texture of his mental and moral being. This is the portion of goods which falleth to him and with which he has set out on his world-pilgrimage. Indeed without this antecedent and subjective revelation having first of all been incorporated into his very structure, any subsequent and objective revelation would have as much chance of a reception and appreciation, as would the gracious visit of light to sightless eyes. It comes therefore to this that the ungodly man is of necessity an ill-balanced man. He is not giving scope to the whole of his nature. The higher side is not in gear. He is therefore defective in control. Nor is this all. This higher side of his nature is not content to be ignored. It has its claims and its own way of asserting them. And though these claims may be disputed and repudiated, yet, as we have said, this cannot be done without violence. But this very violence breaks up the unity of a man's personality. His household is divided against itself, with the senior member of it gyved and gagged.

It is to this senior member that the external revelation is addressed, and between these two there is in spite of all attempts to censor and even mutilate communications, a sort of private wire, so that Paul was able to say: "By manifestation of the truth, we commend ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God."

But a house divided against itself, says Christ, cannot stand. That is to say, it lacks the unity which is the necessary element of permanence, and in the day of storm will be shattered into fragments and scattered in dust; or, to use the words of the text,—will be like the chaff which the wind driveth away.

Here then, over against the permanence of a God-centred life as symbolised in the sturdy tree, is placed the passing and perishing stay of the self-centred life, as emblemed in the driven and distracted chaff. The godly life is the way of permanence because it is the way of entrance into God's structural purpose and plan, in pursuance of which, all who acknowledge Him as Master and Lord are wrought up into that spiritual Temple the stones of which are human lives. Godliness is the binding element in human life. It is the only thing that can give

unity and coherence to character. And the reason for this is that we were made for God, to be dwelt in by Him. He alone is capable of assuming full command of the powers He has bestowed. He is the only conductor who can evoke the maximum music from life's orchestra. He alone can bring into play the full concert of all the powers.

Religion is not only a binding of one's self back to God in bonds of loving loyalty, but also a binding into a unity of all the powers which constitute one's own personality. It is the living ligamentary system of the spiritual realm, which co-ordinates the whole nature, physical, intellectual, and moral, marshalling it as one thing, to one end, and with no single inch of power left out. Religion, when it has its own way and gets through with a man, leaves absolutely no remainders. It uses him all up, finding an office for every function, and a field for every force. The ungodly are not so.

First of all they are not harmonised with God and there is the consequent sense of dislocation and disintegration which this involves. They are cut off by their own self-will and pride of heart from the source and fount of the highest

satisfaction, and yet with the maddening desire for it still clamant and refusing to be still, or to be put off with lying words. They are not *with* God in His beneficent purpose and plans therefore they are *against* Him, for as we have seen, there is no neutrality possible, so that for us to be against Him is to have Him against us. It is not merely that we are up against a dead blank unyielding wall, but against a living active will, that has for its executive officers Infinite Wisdom and Infinite Power, the ministers of His infinite Love. We are hedged in on all sides by laws, administered with unsleeping vigilance. Against them we have not a sporting chance. We might as well try to escape from the law of gravitation. We are beset behind and before and cannot move without their surveillance or consent. But, forsooth, because they forbear to strike the moment we transgress, we fool ourselves into a sense of false security. We mistake the postponement of penalty for an amnesty, and interpret the suspension of our sentence for an indulgence. We fondly imagine that we have out-distanced our retribution, because the years have intervened between it and the offence. But the Avenger is ever on our trail. Our liberty is carefully cur-

tailed, and He can cover the distance in an instant. He can cancel it at a pounce.

Is it any wonder then that the vanity with which the ungodly strut and swagger, should provoke the derision of the Gods, or that He that sitteth in the heavens should laugh! He knows that every avenue of escape is blocked and that our undoing is sure. Neither is there any safety in numbers. Any confederation of man, however finely organised, which deliberately leaves God out of account is doomed to disintegration. It builds into its system the spirit of negation, a spirit that must react against its structure and induce its decay. Here lies the peril of our modern democracy, lest it should build itself up in defiance of God and the moral law; mistaking material might for stability, and regarding mere magnitude as conferring the right to survive; whereas all history proves that numbers not only cannot help in such a case, but sadly hinder. The momentum of a nation's descent is measured by its mass. Once we get a move on in the downward way, every step we take will accelerate the velocity of our descent, and diminish our chances of arrest and recovery. The structural principle of a society is the governing factor of

its fate. All you have to ask with regard to any state or nation, any guild or fraternity, any employers' federation or trade union, or any corporate body of any kind, is this simple question—What is the vital principle of its incorporation—why was it called into being? what holds it together? by what spirit is it fired? To what end is it being worked? and you have the forecast of its fortunes, and the problem of its destiny can be instantly solved. That which is built up in the fear of God and the love of man, will abide and survive all the shocks of earth and time; that which is built up in defiance of God and of the rights of man will be as dust and chaff. It matters not how wealthy or powerful or finely organised or highly weaponed, or cleverly administered, the combine may be, nor under what distinguished patronage it may flourish, if it holds in its heart the negation of God, and the disregard of man then though it be exalted to heaven with privilege it will be thrust down in to the hell of perdition. God is the one all-binding concept, the universal term in which alone all particulars find their unity and come to rest. There have been federations from the Tower of Babel down, but like it they have all ended in confusion, when

the structural principle has been independence of God and indifference to man. Or, to put it still more plainly, they have been built up on a two-fold falsehood—their two corner stones have been these twin lies—repudiation of God; exploitation of man. These lies are linked by a logic that is adamant. Hatred of God and inhumanity to man have always gone together. You cannot find fraternal brothers among unfilial sons, and any brotherhood of man that does not root itself in the soil of fulfilled relations to God will lack depth of earth and speedily wither away.

Let us be warned against ignoring or defying the subjective Revelation to which we have referred—that inner witness for God, that bit of localised Deity, we call conscience, loyalty to which can alone give unity to life which otherwise must be torn in twain. In order to be guilty of disloyalty in an earthly sense it is not necessary that a man should personally insult his ruler. An affront offered to his representative, will be so interpreted and become an indictable offence. So in order to be ungodly a man need not say or do anything by which the name of God will be dishonoured among men. All he requires to do is to treat conscience, God's local representative, with

contemptuous disregard, and what he does against conscience God will hold as being done against Himself. By a law as subtle as it is inevitable, will the disintegration of character set in; for the only solid ground upon which a man can stand and start to build up anything in the way of a permanent moral structure has to be found in his fidelity to conscience. He must be true to the inner voice. This is fundamental. It does not matter what good work he may put into the superstructure; unless this foundation work be well and truly done, everything will come toppling into ruins about his ears. There will be no need of any outside force to compass his destruction; he will break up from within, and the driving wind will only complete the work of disintegration, which his infidelity to conscience commenced.

Do these words meet the eye of any man whose conscience is hostile to his way of life, so that he has to carry on with the best part of him, not only out of business, but in positive opposition? Then let me say to him: You have forsaken Duty for Desire; you have forsaken Truth for a lie; and unless you spring back to the side of conscience, there is only one end to your track—for the judgment of conscience within is merely a

forecast of the judgment of God beyond. It is to save you and me from this judgment, to head us off the path of lies, and back to truth that the whole ministry of Redemption is directed. To save us from this lie, the spirit of Truth is ever on your track. Francis Thomson's great lines might well become the man who speeds from this spirit of Truth:

I fled Him down the nights and down the days;
I fled Him down the arches of the years;
I fled Him down the labyrinthine ways
Of my own mind; and in the midst of tears
I hid from Him, and under running laughter,
Up vistaed hopes I sped;
And shot, precipitated
Adown Titanic glooms of chasmèd fears,
From those strong feet that followed, followed after,
But with unhurrying chase,
And unperturbèd pace,
Deliberate speed, majestic instancy,
They beat, and a Voice beat,
More instant than the feet,
"All things betray thee, who betrayest Me."

IX

The Ungodly Shall Not Stand in the Judgment

This text has a forward look. It has to do with futures—*contrasted futures.* It is a forecast of destinies—*divergent destinies.* We felt that this was coming. It was inevitable—the only logical outcome of the situations here described. To this has the whole trend of the Psalmist's thought been leading. From his very first word it became clear that he was about to strike out a startling study in contrasts. There would have been no point in his clear-cut distinction, between the godly and ungodly man at the outset, if they had ultimately to fare alike, and fetch up at the same destination. This would have been not only false art, but bad morality. Both æsthetic taste and moral sense must have taken offence at such confusion. For however indiscriminately men may be mixed up in the throng of the market-place and in the daily struggle for place and power—however indistinguishable they

may be in the mass, *distinction we know there is.* It is a distinction moreover, that laughs to scorn our arbitrary social classifications on the basis of mere wealth, or learning or prestige. It pushes behind and beneath all that is surface and accidental, to those deep and essential qualities that constitute character, and there it sets up its judgment seat. Contrasted choice had to express itself in contrasted conduct; contrasted conduct had to crystallise into contrasted character; and contrasted character had to finalise into contrasted destiny, if the moral fitness of things was to be preserved, and the ethical necessities of the case be met.

But this forward look is not common in the Old Testament Scriptures; at least, not in anything like clear and decisive outline. The ancient Hebrew doctrine of a future life was nebulous in the extreme. One feels that it was not so much any hope of personal immortality by which they were stirred as that of national perpetuity—the survival of Israel as a nation. The individual aspiration toward an endless future was swallowed up in the larger hope and expectation for the corporate continuity of the community.

Although it has been claimed and with some

show of reason that the doctrine of personal immortality was held by some of the Old Testament writers, one has the feeling that they rather borrowed it from other faiths, than evolved it from their own. Christ shows, however, that it lay implicit but unsuspected in the ancient warrant under which Moses had accepted his commission to lead the chosen people from Egypt to the Promised Land. But until Jesus quoted that ancient pronouncement "I am the God of Abraham" who would ever have dreamt of finding in it a proof-passage of personal immortality and the pledge of a life beyond the grave? Doubtless the higher spirits, among whom must be included the author of our Psalm, had intimations of immortality which they gathered up and expressed in fine foreshadowings which they themselves, however, but dimly understood.

But deep in the heart of man has been kindled a passion for the permanent, which all the streams of time and circumstance have never been able to quench. There has always been an instinctive belief that high over all the weavings of time and change, there is that which survives, and abides—"unchanging in the midst of change," as Schiller says. "There is one Quiet Spirit," from

whom all other spirits have emanated and to whom, when they have completed their cycle they shall all return.

Now this is the unexpressed assumption underlying the whole of this Psalm, and which in order to get its full understanding must now be brought into view. It is controlling all the Psalmist's thought and feeling from the first word to the last, which two words gather up and in vivid terms portray the contrast, which all the words between them are employed to express and enforce. This dominating element gives confidence to the Psalmist's mind, precision to his discrimination, and point to his words. Clearly this man knows the human heart, and is certain of his ground; so certain indeed that he can build upon it with the utmost confidence that the structure which he rears can never be disturbed. True, he does not gather up and apply what he has been teaching, but the application is all the more powerful, the appeal is all the more poignant, that the reader is compelled to make it for himself. This compulsion springs out of the underlying assumption to which we have already referred, and thus abundantly proves its truth. It is the twofold fact tenaciously and universally

held, first, that in spite of all the changes of this mortal life, there is a belief in an abiding element that no age can wither and no power destroy; and secondly, that the desire to come into its possession and hold it for our own, has been the driving wheel of all lofty and sustained endeavour in the life history of the race. It is the element of change and inconstancy against which the human spirit protests. Man resents the repeated betrayal of his hopes. If he could but be assured that over against the indwelling hunger for the permanent, there has been placed the meat that endureth unto everlasting life, that over against the tottering fabrics of time there has been placed the "House not made with hands, eternal in the Heavens," then he could still bear up and carry on, in the very teeth of disaster and defeat. This is the one thing needful to hearten the good man, and put solid ground beneath his feet, viz., that he is in the thing that is going to last. This is the one all-confounding, disconcerting thing to the ungodly, that he is putting everything into a bag with holes; that his treasure is laid up where moth and rust corrupt and thieves break through and steal. He has put by nothing for a rainy day. He has not even a roof to keep him from

the wet. His house is built on sand so that when, as Christ declares, the floods come and the winds blow, it topples into ruins about his ears.

Whatever else then may have been dim and uncertain to the Psalmist's mind, this at least was clear, that the moral contrasts in the way of character must have a corresponding contrast in the way of destiny, and that contrast, the judgment will declare. It is no less clear that in the Psalmist's estimate man's destiny does not terminate with earth and time. If it did, his whole philosophy of life could easily be refuted. Nothing was more certain *then*, as nothing is more patent *now*, that so far as this life is concerned, and narrowing our view to three score years and ten, the ungodly have frequently the happier lot; that is to say, measured by merely material standards and cutting out the moral satisfactions that the godly enjoy—which we are bound to do if we make existence co-terminous with the grave.

On the principle, however, of an infinitely extended duration of being, in which for the godly an eternal weight of glory is shown, as making light by contrast the momentary afflictions of time, it seems only a fair thing that the ungodly should have the best of it here. At any rate, see-

ing the godly hold the promise of the future, they should be the last to grudge to the ungodly the full enjoyment of the present. Such enjoyment is perfectly explicable and indeed equitable. If a man elects to live only for the present moment and is prepared to pay the price for the present moment, then it is only fair that he should get what he pays for. If he gives more than it is worth, and finds that he has been fooled, well, that is his own lookout. If he chooses to pay away character for gold, a clear conscience for some coveted honour, peace of mind for worldly place and power, and the abiding glories of eternity for the perishing garlands of time, there is no one who can prevent him. He is master of his fate. He has the management of his own affairs, the investment of his own capital, the handling of his own securities. If he prefers to fool them away in worthless deals, that is his concern. All these things are his own, to mortgage, to barter, or to retain—to multiply or stultify at will. But it is only fair that he should have the issues clearly placed before him, and that he should know what he is doing before being called upon to decide. Because to put before a man alternatives of choice which carry such tre-

mendous consequences, and at the same time veil from him the alternatives of destiny which those choices involve, would not be a square deal. It would be to put him at such a manifest disadvantage that should he in his ignorance make a wrongful selection, he might well turn upon his Maker and challenge His right to cast the creature which his hands have made in consequences which he could not foresee, and which he would never have willingly incurred.

Now according to the teaching of this book there has never been a time, nor a place, nor a people in history, that has not had light and knowledge enough to make a right moral decision. This light is not merely an external and impersonal illumination flashed in upon the soul from without, and enabling it to discern between right and wrong. It is an internal and personal presence, a *Someone* not ourselves, who not content that the whole field of the intentions should be lighted up and that good and evil should be clearly set before us in strong and striking contrast, urges the will with beseeching entreaty to refuse the evil and to choose the good.

According to our lesson, this other than ourselves, this Light that lightens every man that

cometh into the world is no less than Christ himself; and He has always been thus identified with the race, working in the heart of it, unrecognised but felt; incarnating himself through all the ages before His earthly advent, entering into all the struggles of the race which he was pledged from the outset to redeem. The Sun of Righteousness thus arises in the consciousness of every man that cometh into the world. This sunrise may not be greeted with equal gladness by all upon whom it breaks—Christ has shown how men's moral preferences determine their attitude towards its revelations. When their deeds are evil, the light becomes a disturbing presence and they seek the more friendly darkness, not merely because under its cover detection is less likely, but for the sake of their own comfort, and to veil from themselves the vision of their own defilement, which the white radiance of this inner light blackens into a hideous blot. For us to go against conscience is to go against Christ, but to go against Him is to have Him against us, and this no man of us can afford. We need Him. We cannot do without Him. We have a record stained and marred by selfishness and sin, but it is a record which He has taken over, and is

prepared to cancel for all who will receive Him as their Saviour and Lord. We are moving up to judgment, but He waits to be retained on our behalf. A whisper will secure His advocacy. By His cross He has won this right to appear on our behalf.

Yea, Thou wilt answer for us, Righteous Lord!
Thine all the merits, ours the great reward;
Thine the sharp thorns, and ours the golden crown;
Ours the life won, and Thine the life laid down.

X

For the Lord Knoweth the Way of the Righteous; But the Way of the Ungodly Shall Perish

The Psalmist is still extending his line of cleavage. He has returned to his figure of the divided ways and is following them to their widely different ends. This unveiling of ultimate issues is full of sobering significance. Contrasted courses of conduct lead inevitably to contrasted goals. The way of the righteous is a divinely prescribed method of life. It is a life under law, not of ordinance from without but of regulative principles from within. This liberation from outside legislation, this shifting of the seat of rule, so that the centre of administration is within the man's own breast, marks a great advance on the legal righteousness which observes mere prohibition and command. It is the end to which all statute law is directed. The divine method as deduced from the Scriptures, is from many laws to few, and from few to none. Hence "Christ

is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth." He becomes the end of the law by becoming the beginning of a principle. Christ formed in the heart, releases us from the petty laws and ordinances—"Touch not, taste not, handle not." "The righteousness which is of faith saith. . . ." "The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart." This is God's redeeming purpose, to create within us a new life principle and then, stripping us of all external legislation, to say to us, "You have the freedom of the universe, you can go where you like, you can do what you like, you can eat what you like, you can drink what you like;" because He knows that such freedmen will neither eat nor drink nor do anything else excepting for the glory of God and the betterment of their brother-men. There is a great passage in the Eighth Chapter of St. Paul's letter to the Romans which strongly bears on this—"The law of the spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death." The great Apostle has been showing the redemption that is in Christ Jesus from the condemnation and tyranny of sin. The emancipation is accompanied, if not really effected, by a voluntary break on the part of the redeemed

soul with one environment, and the setting up of correspondence with another. The freedman passes from the rulership of the flesh to that of the spirit. But as we have seen, it is a freedom under law and effected by law. There is nothing capricious or haphazard in the transaction. It is represented as being in perfect order and quite in accordance with some prearranged process and plan. Here are two laws set over against one another—"the law of the Spirit of life" and "the law of sin and death," with the heart of man supplying both the field of their contest, and the object of their strife. In each of these cases the word "law" must be construed as a working force. It is in this sense that the Apostle employs the term, because then as now it was its popular meaning, though, as we have shown in a previous study, in a strictly scientific sense "law" and "force" must always be distinguished. Laws are merely the registered observations of how forces behave, the conditions they observe and the directions they take. We perceive in the world of things that, given certain antecedent conditions, certain sequences uniformly succeed; whereupon we describe such uniformity of succession as the "law" of that particular process. But the law

is not the process and must not be confounded with it. It simply lays down the lines, so to speak, along which the process moves to its end. It is, to the force that follows its lead, what the permanent way is to a train, only without the train's possibility of deviation; for nature's rolling-stock never jumps the points, nor leaves its predetermined track.

We recognise the reign of law in the physical realm and adjust our conduct to its inevitableness. "Safety first" is a canon of common sense, which, in all our handling of nature's forces, it is our wisdom to observe. We know that no allowance is ever made in that realm for carelessness or contempt. It is true we can often play off one law against another to their mutual modification and to the emergence and enlistment of a third, which, but for such offset, would never have been suspected to exist. But all this becomes possible because of the absolute steadfastness and regularity with which the forces of nature observe their laws, and the obedience with which we line up with their requirements. Only in proportion as we obey nature can we command her. To utilise her forces we must keep step with her and go her way. Now, from what Paul

says it would appear that what we find possible in the physical realm and under material laws, has its parallel of possibility in the spiritual realm, and under moral laws. "The law of the spirit of life" under which the righteous man pursues his course, is set over against "the law of sin and death" by which the ungodly man is controlled.

When it is said that "the Lord knoweth the way of the righteous," it must be understood to mean that it is the way of God's appointment and approval. It is the way of the Lord for man's life and conduct. It is the track to the realisation of the divine purpose and desire. It is the limitation within which man can alone become and achieve his best, or reach his finest and most complete self-expression. A way means direction and progress and an end to which it leads. It carries the idea of definiteness and delineation.

It is the way along which the righteous man finds the enabling dynamic for all the claims of life and service. He picks up energy by the very act of pursuing his track. Running on concurrently with him is a veritable stream of enabling force that feeds the strength of every saint. Our great locomotives are so constructed that they can

pick up water as they go and thus replenish their waste. But such supply is found strictly within the lines prescribed by the "permanent way," and is only available as an engine is moving up to a certain rate of speed. Anything under, say twenty-five miles an hour, would disqualify it from tapping these reserves. Let it loiter and linger along the lines and its appropriating function cannot come into operation, with the result, that so far as it is concerned, all the wealth of provision must go by default.

The godly man then in pursuing his course of conduct along the lines of God's "permanent way," which is the way of righteousness, finds himself divinely empowered. In proportion to his diligence will he be able to appropriate supplies. He links up with the Eternal. He enlists the "Powers of the world to come." The stars in their courses fight on his behalf. He is on the winning side. No weapon that is formed against him can prosper. He is in with a combine that will outlive and outlast all the accidents of earth and time; for, "The world passeth away and the lust thereof, but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever."

"But the way of the ungodly shall perish."

That is to say, his course of life gets him nowhere. It is a track that loses itself. Its so-called freedom is a delusion and a snare. It beckons only to betray. It leaves a man down-and-out. He finds himself homeless and unblest. Instead of his track yielding blessedness and reinforcement, it is a path that drains and depletes his physical, mental, and moral force. Any one who has ever missed his way on a moor or fen, or in the forest gloom, where multitudinous tracks cross and re-cross in bewildering confusion, will understand what it is to strike a path that perishes. It looks at first like some clearly defined road to some certain seat and centre of home-life. With joyful expectation the belated traveller picks up the trail, only however to find it growing fainter and fainter till at last it dies away into entire obliteration—a perished path! The forest lands and prairie wastes of every country have had their tragedies, in which despairing travellers "have laid them down in their last sleep," and years after their white bones have told the story of desperation and defeat. This is bad enough and sad enough when only the body is concerned; but when, as in the case with which the Psalmist deals, it is the soul that is involved, the tragedy deepens

into sevenfold gloom. Life running to waste through wickedness—life shorn of its beauty and smitten of its crown, pushing its tired way across the trackless desert of "no God," with the sun beating down upon its unprotected head, with no shelter from the heat—no friendly rock to shadow in the weary land—stumbling blindly and painfully and with the horror of a great loneliness gripping the soul—this is the picture which the Psalmist sets before us, in its stark nakedness, that perchance he may startle us into attention, and turn us from the error of our ways.

Have any of us thus wandered into the wilderness, and is the devil of despair mocking us with his laughter of derision, bidding us abandon hope of rescue or return? Then he is a liar, for we have to do with the "God of Hope," who bends with infinite tenderness over the distracted and disillusioned soul, and, if we will but turn to him, with the faintest flicker of homesick desire, we shall be caught up to His mighty heart, and know as we have never known before, that God is love.

THE END

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